12-2015

Proactive Communication: An Investigation of Employee Reactions to Organizational Communication Problems

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Proactive Communication: An Investigation of Employee Reactions to Organizational Communication Problems

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Katie Marie Reno
December 2015

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the many people who have supported me through this process. There are too many people to list or to fully acknowledge, but I would like to point out a few. First, I would like to thank my parents and family for their patience as I pursued this degree. Second, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues for their offers of support, advice, and guidance. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge my committee members for stewardship throughout the dissertation process. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge Wesley for his unwavering support.

Abstract

This study explored how employees proactively responded to perceived communication problems and what employees considered when proactively responding. The study utilized semi-structured interviews to gather data, resulting in 15 interviews. The interviews were transcribed yielding 130 single-spaced pages of data. Template analysis was used to code the data for themes. This analysis was chosen because it allowed the researcher to utilize previously established literature to develop a codebook, which could then be modified on the data.

The findings demonstrate that employees will enact many types of proactive behavior to correct perceived communication problems in an organization. Findings also demonstrated that participants often involved co-workers in their proactive behaviors. Altogether, findings support the notion that several factors may influence the proactive process.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

What do employees do when communication is not working well? What actions do employees take to improve communication when it does not work? To date, researchers as well as practitioners have no clear answers to these questions. While an impressive body of literature exists that examines how communication can be improved in organizations (e.g., Downs & Adrian, 2004; Kramer, 2004; Neves & Eisenberger, 2012), the vast majority of this work focuses on the efforts of management to bring about effective workplace communication. Few, if any, studies have examined how nonsupervisory employees initiate interaction with the goal of improving communication in the workplace. Therefore, the purpose of this project is to explore how employees proactively respond to perceived communication problems and to uncover what employees consider when proactively responding.

One possible explanation for the limited attention directed toward proactive communication originating from employees can be traced to the traditional foci of organizational communication research. From its inception, a management perspective has dominated study into organizational communication. As Redding, the father of the organizational communication field, admits "our field began…with uncritical acceptance of the narrow management bias and with methods designed according to the suggestions of logical positivism-'character traits' that we have not fully outgrown to this day" (Tompkins & McPhee, 1985, p. 9). This bias was present during the 1950s and 1960s with research having a "proclivity to see problems from the top manager's desk alone (Tompkins & McPhee, 1985, p. 9).

This management emphasis is apparent in measures designed to assess organizational communication such as the International Communication Association (ICA) audit. Over an eight-year time span during the late 1970s and early 1980s, the ICA audit was developed with the goal of providing a comprehensive measure of organizational communication (Hargie & Tourish, 2009). This comprehensive measure was designed with the notion that researchers as well as consultants would be able to evaluate organizational communication and to provide the information to upper management. Management could then implement changes based on the audit to improve communication and organizational functioning. The ICA audit explores several components of organizational communication such as sources of information, channels of information, and the desired amount of information (Hargie & Tourish, 2009). These types of items, however, still focus on areas controlled by management. The audit clearly reflects a management viewpoint and leaves improvements to workplace communication in the hands of management.

When considering the issue of improving communication, researchers may consider failures of communication in the workplace. However, the limited number of studies exploring communication problems encountered by employees tends to examine day-to-day communication in a postmortem context with the goal of understanding what went wrong in high profile cases. For example, Wickman (2014) examined problems in communication surrounding the BP Deep Horizon explosion and resulting oil spill, which led to 11 deaths and serious environmental consequences. Chomik (2011) noted communication failures and issues with interagency communication in the intelligence community that contributed to the tragic 9/11 terrorist attacks. In yet a third study, Herndl and colleagues (1991), when referring to the Three Mile Island accident and Challenger disaster, stated:

> Both these technological disasters involved failures of communication among ordinary professional people, mistakes committed in the course of routine work on the job, small

> mishaps with grotesque consequences. Enormous amounts of routine communication are done unthinkingly every day by large numbers of professional people; most of it disappears into the files and remains unremarked and unexamined by scholars interested in professional communication. But, disaster makes otherwise routine and invisible communication accessible, disaster makes the study of it compelling (p. 279-280, In Bazeman & Paradis, 1991).

Taken together, the literature consistently speaks to the importance of day-to-day communication in the functioning of organizations and its impact on important organizational outcomes. It also demonstrates the trend for research to focus on communication when there are adverse consequences such as loss of money, loss of life, negative press, or environmental impact. Though this is important research, it may be more fruitful to examine communication issues before the consequences reach dire thresholds. This examination should explore how organizational members seek to improve conditions when there are perceived communication issues. This line of research may ultimately prevent large-scale organizational consequences.

The potential difficulties that surface in day-to-day communication can cover a variety of contexts and degrees of importance (e.g. communication required to complete a task). The issues could be as basic as co-workers not communicating important information or supervisors who do not provide feedback to employees on projects. Regardless the type of perceived problem, organizational members may recognize the issue and take action to correct it. Popular press books, such as *Failure to Communicate* (Weeks, 2008), often consider this more basic day-to-day communication and responses to communication failures. Nonetheless, scholarly research in this area is more limited. This study, therefore, focuses on how employees proactively respond to perceived communication problems in the workplace. Moreover, this project explores what employees consider when proactively responding.

The communication phenomena that occurs within organizations will be labeled Proactive Employee Communication (PEC) for the purposes of this study. This concept refers to the interaction of individuals who recognize the need to modify communication in the organization to achieve workplace objectives. This may be in response to previous experiences where there were perceived problems with organizational communication. This may also occur in response to anticipation of problematic communication. The anticipation of communication problems may stem from circumstances or previous experience involving workplace events. Three components define this concept of proactive employee communication. First, proactive communication involves recognition by the employee that there is or may be a problem with communication. Second, the employee decides to take action different from the current behavior or ineffective processes. Third, the employee acts with a goal of improving or enhancing the communication. Proactive communication can occur at different levels of an organization including the individual, team, or organizational level. Taken together, proactive employee communication results in an action that seeks to enhance communication and resolve perceived communication problems.

A review of research related to the proactive concept may shed light on a family of related concepts. For the purpose of this project, proactive employee communication is considered one type of proactive behavior. Proactive behavior is an umbrella term that encompasses many types of behaviors, with the majority of research emanating from management related fields. Few studies in management examine or label behaviors as communication, yet the behaviors examined by management scholars often fall within the category of communication. One example of this is feedback seeking by employees, a type of proactive behavior. The literature examining this behavior does not explicitly address the behavior as communication. A closer examination of the conceptualization of proactive behavior reveals how proactive employee communication can be considered a type of proactive behavior. Specifically, proactive behaviors occur when an employee challenges the status quo and attempts to change existing practices in the workplace (Crant, 2000). These behaviors may be self-directed and are designed to improve overall conditions in the organization (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Proactive behaviors may fall outside normal operating procedures in an organization. This directly applies to the PEC because individuals must communicate to challenge the status quo and to improve conditions. This issue is further explored in the literature review.

Other conceptual frameworks that may shed light on proactive employee communication are self-presentation and impression management. Theories in these areas also make use of social influence because individuals use impression management (self-presentation) as a way to gain influence (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989). These concepts can be applied to this area of study because communicators do consider their impressions when their behaviors are proactive and outside the norm. This area of research is further explored to support a link between proactive communication and impression management.

To better understand how people modify interactions and communicate within the organization, the Goals, Plans, and Action theory is used to clarify the various components of the behavior. This theory proposes that individuals do not simply enact influence communication but that they go through a cognitive process before interacting.

Proactive Behaviors

One could argue that proactive behaviors are a crucial part of organizational functioning. Several studies demonstrate this critical component, with research linking proactive actions to higher job performance (Grant, Parker, & Collins, 2009), higher job satisfaction (Morrison, 1993b), and organizational success (Frese & Fray, 2001). Not surprisingly, this research includes competing ways of conceptualizing and operationalizing proactivity. With disparate studies examining proactive behaviors, competing conceptualizations of proactive behaviors emerge from the literature. These definitions emphasize the various components of this concept and outline the boundaries of proactive behavior. Furthermore, they articulate how such boundaries fall in line with the notion that PECs are a type of proactive behavior.

Crant (2000) defines proactive behaviors as “taking initiative in improving current circumstances or creating new ones; it involves challenging the status quo rather than passively adapting to present conditions” (p. 436). This definition emphasizes that individuals change the current state and that their behaviors move beyond the organizational norms. Bindl and Parker (2011) further define proactive behavior as “self-directed and future-focus action in an organization in which the individual aims to bring about change, including change to the situation (e.g., introducing new work methods, influencing organizational strategy) and/or change with him- or herself (e.g. learning new skills to cope with future demands)” (p. 568). This definition expands the concept by considering how the individual’s self-directed action may be targeted at different sources.

Moreover, according to Parker and Collins (2010), two additional elements of defining proactivity are anticipation and taking control because “these behaviors have in common an emphasis on taking control of a situation by looking ahead and initiating change” (Bindl &

Parker, 2011, p. 568). These key elements emphasize that a critical component of proactive behavior is the event of anticipation or the ability to think about the future. Also crucial is the component of taking control of the situation, which requires an individual to take the initiative to act. Thus, the behavior is self-directed and does not require a push from another individual. Significant to the conceptualization of proactive behaviors is that they may be a part of in-role behaviors or extra-role behaviors (Crant, 2000). In-role behaviors seek to fulfill job requirements, whereas extra-role behaviors are not directly required for the job but may be used to redefine the role of the job (Crant, 2000). Lastly, proactive behaviors may have variation in the targets such that behaviors may be directed toward improving the self, others, and the organization (Grant & Ashford, 2008).

From this conceptualization of proactive behaviors, it can be argued that organizational members enact proactive employee communication when taking self-directed actions to improve the workplace. Also part of the proactive behavior is act of challenging the status quo, which implies members do not simply follow standard procedures when problems occur. Instead, members would enact behaviors considered outside the norm after determining standard procedures ineffective. Additionally, for members to realize they need to enact a behavior outside the norm they must anticipate problems. Anticipation and awareness are other elements of proactive behaviors because members comprehend an issue or rely on past experience to realize the potential existence of an issue. Organizational members, therefore, may realize a communication issue is possible and enact certain behaviors to prevent the failure of communication. Another part of the conceptualization of proactive behaviors is that members seek to improve conditions. When members find that alternative behaviors lead to more effective communication, they may be more motivated to use communication to achieve organizational objectives.

In addition, proactive behaviors may be directed toward various targets, and such behaviors may be part of the member's duties and responsibilities or may fall outside their designated role in the organization. Employees seeking to enhance communication may act to benefit themselves, their work group, or the organization as whole (i.e. different intended targets).

Impression Management and Social Influence

Another area that may play an important role in proactive employee communication is impression management and social influence. Impression management (often used interchangeably with self-presentation) refers to "the ways that individuals plan, adopt, and carry out the process of conveying an image of self to others" (Arkin & Shepperd, 1989, p. 126). Impression management is concerned with self-image and how different actions may influence the image. The processes of impression management guide social interaction and allow individuals to achieve a defined end goal (Arkin & Shepperd, 1989). When attempting to please and gain support, individuals consider their outward appearance to others and avoid behaviors that would result in a bad impression (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989). Impression management and social influence are related because people take on many roles in an attempt to please those around them and to gain support and influence (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989). The ability to influence is an important component and may influence parts of proactive employee communication.

Social influence within an organization involves the "demonstration of particular behavioral tactics and strategies by individuals to influence behavioral outcomes controlled by others in ways that maximize influencer positive outcomes and minimize negative outcomes.” (Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, Blass, Kolodinsk, & Treadway, 2002, pg. 65). Thus, individuals must carefully consider their behavior. Social influence is at the very foundation of organizations because organizational functioning depends on the influencing others to accomplish organizational goals (Ferris et al., 2002). For an organizational member, the presentation of self is tied to perceptions of the surrounding environment.

Two factors appear to determine the behaviors of self-presentation. The first factor is pleasing the audience, which usually involves conforming and making appearances in line with the social environment (Baumeister, 1989). Therefore, behaviors should conform to audiences’ expectations (Baumeister, 1989). Members typically display this kind of behavior when they are dependent on those around them for some type of resource (Baumeister, 1989). This component of self-presentation usually leads organizational members to act in uniform ways, with changes to fit those around them (Baumeister, 1989). This component may appear to go against the conceptual underpinnings of proactive behavior because this aspect depends on conformity and proactivity necessarily dictates non-conformity. It is possible, however, that members who enact proactive communication may have greater concern with impression management because it might displease the audience. These members may consider how their behaviors will affect their impressions and self-presentation to others and curtail their behavior or plan it more carefully.

The second factor that influences self-presentation behaviors is self-construction. This is an internal factor for organizational members. Instead of being concerned with others’ valuations, individuals are motivated by their personal values (Baumeister in Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989, pg 59). Therefore, individuals enact behaviors that create a certain self-identity and match behaviors to those ideals (Baumeister in Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989, pg 59).

Individual's behaviors will create an impression that aligns with that member's self-identity. This could be a crucial part of proactive communication because members who view themselves as a "go-getter" or a person who takes initiative will enact behaviors that match that identity.

Overall, impression management is a critical part of the organization because, "Organizations are made up of people who observe and make judgments about each other" (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992, p. 311). These impressions are especially important to lower level employees, as supervisors or managers may control rewards and important resources (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). Predictably, impression management plays a role in the next area of discussion: feedback seeking.

When seeking feedback, members may face certain impression management costs. For this reason, researchers have begun to examine the relationship between these two areas. One area is research that focuses on how supervisors' impressions are influenced by their feedback seeking and the different types of feedback sought. Research suggests that when managers seek feedback about negative issues concerning themselves or the organization, they are viewed more positively (Ashford & Tsui, 1991). This may be attributed to the notion that negative feedback is more useful because it is diagnostic in nature, allowing for the implementation of improvements (Ashford & Tsui, 1991). In this context, employees may feel that when supervisors seek feedback regarding problematic issues, they are trying to improve conditions in the organization. Furthering this notion, research revealed that when managers sought feedback on successes they were perceived unfavorably, as this information may not be as useful to improve conditions (Ashford & Tsui, 1991). From this view, it can be argued that proactive employee communication may address the negative aspects of the organization and seeking to improve them should be viewed positively. However, addressing negative aspects of the organization is face threatening, so requests for feedback may be viewed cautiously. Shedding light on this issue, Ashford and Tsui (1991) evaluate impressions of supervisors by employees, finding that there could be differences for employees' impressions when they seek negative feedback. Supervisors might be regarded as needing negative feedback because part of their role within the organization is to identify and fix issues. Employees who seek to address negative aspects may appear to be complaining or cutting down the organization because it is not within their role to fix negative issues. Moreover, the feedback seeker faces the potential social cost of appearing weak or unsure (Ashford & Tsui, 1991; Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). This issue may influence proactive employee communication, as members may feel that seeking to fix communication issues demonstrates an inability to accomplish tasks without extra assistance or resources. This assumption aligns with the major issues that individuals face when seeking feedback, which is concern with presenting a favorable impression (Morrison & Bies, 1991).

Concerns over creating a favorable impression may moderate certain behaviors within the organization. Awareness of impressions during feedback seeking may influence the type of strategies used or may prevent feedback seeking as a whole (Ashford & Tsui, 1991). This is an important notion because the need for proactive communication may require reaching a higher threshold than impression management concerns before it is enacted. Concerns over impression management may also influence the type of proactive communication.

Another concern taken when deciding to seek feedback involves the established norms. These norms may provide cues about the acceptability of certain feedback behaviors and the norms regarding frequency for feedback seeking (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). Even if feedback seeking is an acceptable norm, individuals will still consider impression management to some extent (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992).

Limited research (see Ashford & Northcraft, 1992) suggests that there is a relationship between the proactive behavior of feedback seeking and impression management. When considering the current issue of proactive employee communication, it may be assumed that if a member's behavior is outside the norm and challenging the status quo, then that member would have a heightened concern with impression management. Ashford and Northcraft (1992) also conclude that when employees interact with members that are less well known, they will have more concern for impression management, which may be an important consideration for PEC.

Interestingly, feedback seeking is seen as way to construct impressions (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). This construction may be the goal for some members when they enact proactive employee communication. They may seek interaction with unknown members in an effort to appear innovative to these individuals. Thus, proactive employee communication may be used as a tactic to construct or improve impressions, and the overall take-away is that people consider impressions when enacting behaviors (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). This review demonstrates the important connection between impression management and proactive behaviors. Also important to area of study is the consideration that people may develop or plan their behaviors and interactions. Individuals may consider multiple goals for the interaction that involve impression management. This next section will consider how proactive behaviors are not a simple action but a processing of planning and enacting.

Proactive Behaviors as Process

Proactivity does not involve a single discrete event but reflects a process (Crant, 2000) with several phases (Bindl & Parker, 2011). Grant and Ashford (2008) consider examining the process of proactive behavior to be significant, as it provides a viewpoint that goes beyond basic outcome variables. Grant and Ashford (2008) propose three phases of proactive behaviors that include anticipation, planning, and action. Interestingly, these three phases closely resemble phases in the Goals, Plans, Action model developed by Dillard (1990), which is a communication-based theory.

From this process view, the first phase is anticipation that involves a psychological process, which centers on anticipation and imagination of future events (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Imagining the possible future events allows individuals to assess the cost and benefits associated with these events (Grant & Ashford, 2008). This process allows organizational members to envision the outcomes of behaviors and envision how those behaviors may unfold in a situation (Grant & Ashford, 2008).

The second phase is planning. This phase requires people to develop plans for behavior and consider how they will implement those behaviors (Grant & Ashford, 2008). "Whereas anticipation signifies envisioning an event or outcome, planning signifies transforming this vision into an implementation guide" (Grant & Ashford, 2008, p. 10). Part of this planning is developing alternative courses of action such as a backup plan and alternative strategies (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Frese & Fay, 2001; Fiol & O'Connor, 2003). This stage represents the connection between anticipation and concrete behaviors, which is the final phase.

The final phase is action focusing on future impact, which is the "physical manifestation of anticipation and planning in concert behaviors" (Grant & Ashford, 2008, p. 11). This action carries out thoughts reflective of long term and short term impacts (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Research examining these phases has mainly focused on considerations of future impact (Ashford & Grant, 2008), with less focused attention on the actual concrete behavior and what that behavior encompasses. Building on Ashford and Grant's (2008) work, Bindl and Parker (2009) add a fourth phase labeled reflecting, which consists of thinking about the proactive behavior and the results that spring from it. This fourth phase might serve to start the process over again, as the phases may not be sequential (Bindle & Parker, 2009).

Grant and Ashford's (2008) proposed phases provide greater insight into proactive behaviors and support the notion that some amount of planning goes into behaviors. However, conceptual difficulties remain with this formulation of process. The phases of anticipation and planning appear to overlap and it may be difficult to separate the phases for the purpose of study. This is evident when considering the differences between envisioning how behaviors unfold (i.e. phase one) and an implementation guide (i.e. phase two). These two phases may unfold together in time following parallel tracks. Clarifying the phased process and what occurs within each phase is needed (Bindle & Parker, 2011). The Goals, Plans, and Action (GPA) theory may provide insight into this process because it provides more detailed propositions of what occurs within each phase.

Goals, Plans, Action Theory

Goals, Plans, Action (GPA) theory was developed to gain an understanding of processes by which people produce messages when they are trying to change or maintain the behaviors and attitudes of others (Dillard, 2008). One assumption is that individuals will make choices about their purposeful behavior and therefore individuals have some degree of awareness of what they are doing (Dillard, 2008). An examination of the goals and planning component illuminates the process behind purposeful behaviors. This is not to say that all behavior is purposeful but that certain types of behavior are purposeful and may be influenced by goals and planning (Dillard & Schrader, 1998). GPA theory is grounded in social influence processes and provides an understanding of the ways in which people seek to influence others. This theory can be applied to any type of interaction (Schrader & Dillard, 1998) in which a person displays purposeful behavior.

GPA theory proposes a three step sequence that includes goals, planning, and action. The first step concerns goals that take two forms: primary and secondary (Dillard, 2008). Goals are directed by the future state of affairs that an individual seeks to achieve (Dillard, 2008). The second step is planning, which is the cognitive representation of behaviors (Dillard, 2008). Finally, the action, which is the behavior enacted. This model closely follows with the three phase process proposed by Grant and Ashford (2008) to represent the processes of proactive behaviors.

GPA proposes two types of goals that influence the planning process. The first is the primary or influence goal, which serves a motivational function where individuals are motivated by the want of a desired end state of affairs (Dillard, 2008; Dillard, 1990). The primary goal explains what the individual wants and what the interaction is about (Schrader & Dillard, 1998; Dillard, 2008). Dillard (1990) further explains this goal as "when an actor perceives some discrepancy or potential discrepancy between the current state of affairs and the desired state of affairs" (p. 45). This discrepancy or potential discrepancy is what motivates an individual. The significance of the goal is driven by the magnitude of the discrepancy and the importance of the desired state of affairs (Dillard, 1990).

Primary goals provide a stronger understanding of proactive behaviors. Proactive behaviors are directed toward changing the current state by considering the current state and the intended state (Crant, 2000). Dillard (1990) identifies this difference as the driving force behind primary goals in the GPA model. Grant and Ashford (2008) defined this part of the process as anticipatory because it requires that individuals recognize some issue. Grant and Ashford (2008) also argue that, in the anticipatory phase, individuals begin to envision the intended outcome. This characterization lacks clarity, as there is no unambiguous articulation of the differences between the anticipatory and planning phases. Also problematic of the three-phase proactive behavior model is that it provides little explanation of the different types of goals that guide behavior.

The GPA model proposes that primary goals are only one consideration and that individuals also have secondary goals. Secondary goals are ones that "delimit the range of behavioral options available to the speaker" (Schrader & Dillard, 1998, p. 278; Dillard, 1990). The secondary goal inhibits the approach and may ultimately overwhelm it to a point where no behavior is enacted (Dillard, 1990). This would be a significant consideration for proactive behaviors because they require actions beyond the norm.

When developing a plan of action individuals will consider previous experiences or existing plans. However, if these existing plans have led to unsatisfactory results in the past, then individuals will make more complex and complete plans or create a new plan of action (Dillard, 2008). In addition, these plans will be developed around the primary and secondary goal, with consideration of the importance of the goals. Multiple plans may be developed based on the desired end state. The selection of a plan ultimately depends on the alignment of a particular plan with the primary and secondary goals while simultaneously minimizing costs (Dillard, 2008). Once selection occurs, individuals will then enact communication.

This review of proactive behaviors, impression management, and the GPA theory serves as a starting point to examine proactive employee communication. These areas of literature may appear distinct; however, an explanation will demonstrate how they each relate to one another and provide guidance in exploring proactive employee communication. Proactive behavior is an action by which employees seek to improve an organizational issue. The researcher proposed that proactive employee communication may constitute a key component in proactive behavior. This new focus area follows the definition set forth by a limited literature with employees taking action to improve an organizational issue. Instead of focusing on behaviors, this new focus incorporates action that seeks to remedy a communication issue. Proactive behavior literature has suggested that proactivity is not a single discrete event but a process (Crant, 2000; Bindl & Parker, 2011). The researcher proposes that proactive employee communication will also be a process and suggest that Goals, Plans, Action theory provides insight into the planning of communication action. Last, the few studies addressing proactive behaviors (e.g., Ashford & Northcraft, 1992) suggests that feedback (a proactive behavior) is influenced by impression management. Therefore, the researcher proposed that impression management will play a role in proactive employee communication.

Taken together, the literature review provides an illustration of the complex process of proactive behaviors. The literature does offer conceptual opportunities for understanding this process of proactive communication. However, little empirical evidence exists that might clarify how this process works. In addition, little is known about how proactive communication works within a suite of concepts associated with proactive behavior. Thus, this study will be exploratory, seeking to understand how employees proactively respond to perceived communication problems and what employees consider when proactively responding. For the purpose of this study, proactive employee communication is considered one type of proactive behavior.

Based on the previous discussion, it should be clear that proactivity is a complex process. When examining proactive behaviors researchers cannot simply view them as a behavior, but they must also consider them a constructed behavior that is used to solve a perceived organizational issue. Researchers must consider the various components that go into enacting a behavior such as the goals and planning, while considering impression management and the multiple goals into the process. Based on this literature and discussion, the following research questions are proposed:

> RQ1: How do employees proactively respond to perceived communication problems within their organization?
>
> RQ2: What do employees consider when proactively responding to perceived communication problems?

Chapter 2

Methodology

Overview

The goal of the present investigation is to explore communication behaviors in response to perceived ineffective organizational communication. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect rich data that explores employees' proactive organizational communication and behaviors when faced with perceived ineffective communication within their organization. Specifically, the data collection focused on what employees do when they are aware of communication issues and what actions they take to improve or correct situations in the organization.

This method was chosen based on the results of a pilot study that used an open-ended online survey. Previous research using an online survey to collect open-ended data found this procedure to be valuable, resulting in high response rates and rich data (Detert, Burris, Harrison, & Martin, 2013). Responses from participants in the pilot study, however, did not provide rich data. Choosing a method that will answer the research questions should not be dictated by a preference for qualitative or quantitative but what best addresses the question at hand and the phase of the research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Based on this premise and the pilot study, it was determined that the best way to answer the research questions is to use semi-structured interviews.

Framework

When conducting a research study one cannot avoid the discussion of research approaches and philosophical assumptions. It is especially important to consider research approaches and philosophical assumptions when choosing a qualitative or quantitative method. This choice was a contentious point for the researcher because the researcher was primarily trained in a post-positivistic approach using quantitative methods and yet the research area was underdeveloped and needed a qualitative approach.

Qualitative and quantitative methods are often considered distinct and unrelated to each other. However, as Creswell (2014) says "qualitative and quantitative approaches should not be rigid, distinct categories" (p. 3). Instead Creswell (2014) proposes a continuum with mixed methods in the middle. Mixed methods "incorporates elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches" (Creswell, 2014, p. 3). Therefore, researchers should not disqualify one method, but can choose to incorporate elements of both. This point enabled the researcher to consider a mixed methods approach.

Ultimately, the researcher was solely concerned with answering the question of what employees do when communication fails in their organization. The goal of answering this question with the best possible methods led the researcher to the worldview of pragmatism. This worldview is relatively new, with work being in the early 1990s (Creswell, 2014). This worldview aligns closely with mixed methods work and follows the assumption that researchers should choose techniques, methods, and procedures that best answer the needs of the research (Creswell, 2014). The researcher selects the method based on the research questions and stage of development for research topic area (Tashakkori, 1998). Another important component of the pragmatic worldview is the notion that researchers may use qualitative methods to collect data that may later enhance the collection of quantitative data. (Creswell, 2014). For this study, the researcher chose to follow an approach in which qualitative data would enhance later quantitative data collection. Though the first part of this study utilized a survey, the goal of this survey was to collect opened ended data that would then drive the developed of instruments to use on a later survey. Upon realizing that the opened ended data collected through the first survey was not useful, the researcher decided to utilize interviews to collect data. This study, however, will not address the development of quantitative measures. The researcher believes that this current study will enhance further developments in the area and may lead to the development of quantitative measurements.

With the pragmatist viewpoint, the researcher is able to straddle the line between paradigms. The pragmatist “rejects the either-or” and “embraces both points of view” (Tashakkori, 1998). This is not to say that the researcher does not lean more towards one philosophical assumption. The researcher acknowledges that a positivistic viewpoint dominated the development of this project. The researcher acknowledges this for several reasons. The first of these reasons is that the research relied on previous theory and research to drive the development of the interview guide. Also, the researcher uses template analysis. The template analysis, discussed later in this study, focuses on the use of previous research and work to guide the development of a code book and coding process. Therefore, that analysis does not use a grounded theory approach, which would develop theory from the data. Instead, the researcher uses previous research and theory to guide analysis.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited through several methods. The first method was to make classroom announcements at a local university that focuses on nontraditional students. Following the announcement, students were provided with a recruitment flyer (see Appendix A). The second method was to make announcements via social networking sites (Facebook) and by contacting friends of the researcher via email. For this method, people were provided with the same recruitment flyer. This method allowed the researcher to share the recruitment information with a large number of personal contacts. Additionally, this method allowed the researcher’s personal contacts to share the message with friends and co-workers; thereby, increasing the total audience of the recruitment efforts. The recruitment flyer used provided study information and inclusion criteria. This recruitment method resulted in a sample from a variety of organizations, which may provide better insights into the behavior. This procedure has been used in other qualitative research (Westerman, Miller, Reno, & Spates, 2015).

Participant Characteristics

The inclusion criteria for this study was: participants must (1) be at least 18 years old; (2) be currently employed full time (35 hours or more per week); (3) have at least one supervisor; and (4) have worked at their organization for at least one year. When scheduling interviews, the researcher confirmed that participants met the inclusion criteria found on the recruitment flyer. The recruiting processes resulted in 15 participants. Participants reported working in several industries including: healthcare, higher education, nonprofit work, recruiting, news media, sales, and several government sectors. The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 54, with the average age being 33.06 years. The majority of participants were females, with 66.7% (10) females and 33.3% (5) males. Participants were asked to report ethnicity, 14 (93.3 %) participants reported being Caucasian and only one (6.7%) reported being African American. Participants were also asked to indicate their level of education, 53.3% (8) of participants reported having bachelor degrees, while 46.7% (7) reported having graduate degrees.

Participants were also asked to report information about their tenure with their organization, hours worked each week, and size of their organization. In regards to tenure, participants reported working between one to 29 years at their current organization, with the average tenure being 5.1 years. Participants reported working between 40 and 60 hours per week, with the average being 45.93 hours per week. Finally, participants were asked to report the size of their organization and were provided with five choices. The participants reported one of the following five choices: 2 (13.3%) selected 99 or fewer employees, 1 (6.7%) selected 100-250 employees, 3 (20%) selected 250-500 employees, 1 (6.7%) selected 500-100 employees, and 8 (53.3%) selected 1000 or more employees. One of the participants reported being in an extremely small organization and made a note that the organization only had seven employees.

Procedure

The researcher made announcements (either by passing out flyers directly to students, by contacting people directly, or by posting to social media) asking for participants who felt they had experience with communication within an organization and were willing to share that experience. The flyer provided contact information for the researcher and information about the study (see Appendix A). Once the participants contacted the researcher, they were prescreened to determine if they fit the criteria for the study. Once prescreening was complete the researcher determined a time and location to meet the participants. When meeting the participant for the interview, the researcher provided the participant with an informed consent form (see Appendix B). After obtaining informed consent, the research introduced herself and provided a brief overview of the procedure for the interview. The participants were informed that the interview would be recorded and later transcribed. Following the introduction, a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions was used to collect data (see Appendix C). Open-ended questions are useful because they provide qualitative data, which provides rich and detailed descriptions (Sonpar & Golden-Biddle, 2007). This data can provide specification in an area underdeveloped as far as concepts (Sonpar & Golden-Biddle, 2007). Following the interview, participants were asked several demographic questions (See Appendix D).

The 15 interviews resulted in 10 hours 51minutes of recordings, with an average length of 36 minutes and a range from 22 minutes to one hour 24 minutes. Data saturation was reached at the 9th interview. The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim by a hired transcriptionist. The transcriptionist signed a confidentiality pledge. The transcribed interviews resulted in 130 single-spaced pages of data. The data were reviewed to check for errors and transferred into the QDA Miner software program to assist with coding.

Analysis

Template Analysis

To analyze the data, the researcher chose to use template analysis, which has several advantages over other types of analysis. First, template analysis aligns with the epistemological position of this study. Template analysis can be employed with a positivistic position, which seeks objectivity (King, 2004). Second, template analysis utilizes previous literature to develop the initial codebook (King, 2004). This was especially important to this study because there was established literature in the area of proactive behaviors, which could be used for establishing an initial codebook. Last, template analysis allows for flexibility. In other words, it allows the researcher to tailor the technique to the needs of a study (King, 2004). The researcher was able to develop an initial codebook from previous literature but also had the freedom to add additional codes based on the analysis of the text. In addition, template analysis provides an easy introduction to qualitative methods because its principles are similar to content analysis (King, 2004). This was important to the researcher who was less familiar with qualitative methods but had experience with content analysis. Moreover, development of the initial template forces a more structured approach to analysis data, which lends itself to generating a clearer analysis and report (King, 2004).

Development of the Codebook

Template analysis makes use of a codebook that is initially developed from previous research, knowledge, readings, or theory (Miller & Crabtree, 1999). The initial codebook is considered the template for analysis data, which is initially applied to the text (Miller & Crabtree, 1999). The template (codebook) may go through several modifications and revisions as it is applied to the data, as there is no definite procedure for revisions (Miller & Crabtree, 1999). For this study, the researcher went through multiple revisions of the codebook, which are detailed in the next section.

The researcher first reviewed the dissertation proposal, which is composed of the literature review. Based on this literature review, the researcher generated the first codebook. The first codebook was developed to be very broad, with the goal of encompassing many possibilities. The first codebook was developed strictly following the literature review provided in the dissertation proposal stage. Because the first codebook followed the literature review in the same sequence the first codebook had several overlapping areas, generating duplicate codes. Following the development of the first codebook, the researcher reevaluated the codebook to examine the overlapping codes. Eliminating the overlapping codes resulted in the second codebook. The second codebook closely followed the literature review but eliminated overlapping codes. The second codebook was then developed into a third codebook that followed a logical ordering of how an individual would go about enacting proactive employee communication. This third codebook was created to help the researcher easily identify codes within the text. The third codebook used overarching themes of *before action and behavior*, *cognitive thoughts*, and *action and components of action* with within each theme. This was done so the researcher could easily code the text based on logical ordering of proactive behaviors that made sense to the researcher.

Using the third codebook, the researcher read over the text and began coding the text using the established codes. While reading over the text using the codebook, the researcher also developed new codes. The development of new codes, in addition to the initial codebook, allowed the researcher establish relevant areas not established by the literature. From this read-through, the researcher was able to establish a fourth codebook that combined previous literature and new themes not established by previous research. Using the fourth codebook, the researcher re-read the text two more times. The researcher re-read the text to ensure codes established later in the read through, were coded throughout the text. This also ensured that the research did not miss anything in the read through of the text.

Next the researcher read each text associated with a particular code to ensure consistency across each code and to ensure that all selected text matched each code. Following this procedure, the researcher recognized several areas where separate codes were used but encapsulated a similar theme. One example where the codes encapsulated the same theme occurred with the codes *being careful* and *planning for the action*. Both these codes related to the general theme of planning an action. The code *being careful* indicates that individuals were carefully planning their action. In addition, some codes related to the same theme and were difficult to distinguish because the nuance and meaning of the text passage would be lost. An example of relating codes occurred with the codes “anticipate” and “future focus.” Both codes are essential to the definition of proactive behavior and encompass the theme of individuals foreseeing future events. Following the combination of codes, the researcher organized the codes into an outline.

During the development of this outline, the researcher began grouping codes and categorizing them under larger themes. Appendix E provides the rough outline that the researcher used to begin the writing process. Once the outline was established, the researcher exported the data from QDA Miner into the outline so each section of text tag with each code was in a large Word file. During the write-up of the findings section, the researcher read through an entire section to ensure that the quotes chosen represent each code and the general theme of that section. During this process, the researcher removed two codes that overlapped with other codes. With these codes, the researcher determined that the text fit with other codes. Additionally, the researcher combined two codes to form a new code. The researcher also removed some of the chosen text because the text did not fit perfectly with the code. The researcher also removed some of the chosen text because without the full text the meaning was lost. The removal of text served to provide a comprehensive, concise, and clear write-up of the findings. The researcher has provided a finalized outline of the themes discussed in the findings section to allow for readers to more easily follow along (see Table 1).

Chapter 3

Findings

The findings of this study not only provide an account of how employees proactively respond to perceived communication issues but also provide confirmation that proactive employee communication represents one type of proactive behavior. Proactive employee communication (PEC) entails the recognition or anticipation of a perceived communication problem, planning for action, and the action to correct or prevent the problem. This definition closely aligns with the literature on proactive behavior, which outlines corrective behaviors of employees in an organization (Crant, 2000). The findings discussed in the next section will demonstrate that PEC is a type of proactive behavior and that PEC is a process. Findings will also illuminate factors that employees may consider when engaging in proactive behaviors.

Several themes are discussed in the findings section and are outlined in Table 1. These themes are discussed in the context of two overarching themes. The first overarching theme is *Proactive Employee Communication*. Themes within this set embody the definition of proactive employee communication and provide a picture of what proactive employee communication looks like in the organization. The first three themes demonstrate that proactive employee communication is a process. The first theme discussed is *Anticipation and Future Focus*, which demonstrates how employees foresee problems and plan for the future. The second theme, *Being Careful and Planning for the Action*, illustrates that employees carefully consider their behavior and the consequences associated with proactivity. The subtheme, *Age*, reveals that participants consider the age of the person with whom they are interacting when planning proactivity. The next theme is *Action*, which illustrates how employees enacted proactive employee communication. The fourth theme, *Keeping a Record*, entails employees' proactive behaviors

Table 1. Outline of Themes

Overarching Theme	Theme	Subtheme
Proactive Employee Communication		
	Being Careful and Planning for the Action	
		Age
	Anticipation and Future Focus	
	Action	
	Keeping A Record	
	Getting the Job Done	
	Getting Another Person Involved	
Factors that Influence the Proactive Process		
	Physical Space and Geographic Location	
	Organizational Norms	
		Not my place
		Tenure in the organization
	Self Interest	
		Getting ahead
		Image
		Personal
	Reasons not to be proactive	
		Too busy
		Negative outcomes
		Disenfranchised

used to guard against negative outcomes. The next theme, *Getting the Job Done*, illustrates that employees perceive proactivity as essential to accomplishing tasks. Lastly, the theme *Getting Another Person Involved*, reveals that participants involved co-workers in the proactive behavior.

The second overarching theme is *Factors that Influence the Proactive Process*. Themes within this set extend the basic knowledge of proactive behaviors and provide further understanding of factors influencing proactive employee communication. The first theme, *Physical Space and Geographic Location*, demonstrates how proactivity is influenced by proximity in the workplace. The next theme, *Organizational Norms*, is composed of two subthemes: *Not My Place* and *Tenure in the Organization*. This theme illustrates how organizational norms influence the proactivity. Specifically, the subtheme Not my place, reveals that participants felt there were established norms that prohibit proactive behavior. The subtheme, Tenure in the organization, illustrates that more tenured employees have a better understanding of norms and may be bolder in proactivity. Another theme, *Self Interest*, demonstrates that employees are not solely concerned with the organization but consider themselves when engaging in proactivity behavior. Three subthemes, *Getting Ahead*, *Image*, and *Personal*, demonstrate several areas of self interest worth considering when engaging in proactivity. The last theme, *Reasons not to be Proactive*, demonstrates, through three subthemes (*Too Busy*, *Negative Outcomes*, and *Disenfranchised*), that participants were not always proactive and there were reasons not to be proactive.

The discussion of themes reveals that proactive employee communication is a complicated process. The order used to discuss these themes is based on the initial literature review, which provided a definition and then explored factors that may influence the proactive behavior process. Because a template analysis was used, themes may come directly from the literature. Themes may also extend beyond what is discussed in the literature review to provide insight into new areas of consideration, not established by literature. The quotes used through the findings section, may appear more than one time as there may be multiple meanings related to one section of text.

The findings section, follows a social scientific approach to reporting results. With this in mind, the findings are used to demonstrate support for current trends in literature and to further extend the understanding of proactive employee communication and proactive behavior. The discussion section will explore the findings' significance, propose meanings for the findings, and discuss the potential theoretical and practical applications.

Proactive Employee Communication

Anticipation and Future Focus

Crucial to the definition of proactive behavior and proactive employee communication is the ability to anticipate problems and to think about the future (Bindle & Parker, 2011). This theme represents the first stage in the proactive process. Individuals foresee future problems based on previous experiences or the circumstances surrounding an event. The examples in this section provide evidence that participants consider future events and anticipate problems. Cindy discussed the anticipation of confusion regarding rare claims at work. Cindy stated:

> We would get clarification on how it should be paid out and so however that came out, I would know that that hadn't happened before because nobody knew to begin with. So we'd just share that information in case this ever comes up again.

In this example, Cindy predicted that future employees may not know how to handle this type of claim. Cindy knew the current system would not provide this information in the future for other employees. In response Cindy shared the information regarding the claim with co-workers.

Thus, in this example Cindy is communicating proactively. Other participants shared similar experiences in regards to anticipation of future events. Beverly discussed how co-workers often ignored emails and later questioned whether the emails were sent. Beverly described her solution:

> I do a lot of mass emails to all the managers and then I do a read request so that even if they don't respond, I know that they at least got it. Now of course, that depends upon them to hit the send read request but most of the time, they do. So that works pretty well, I think, for me just because I have to email so many people at once. Then that way, I save them and that way when they inevitably tell me they didn't get the email or don't know what I'm talking about, I can send it to them and be like, "Nope, you said you got it. You said you read it." I do a lot of CYA just because you kind of have to.

Here Beverly anticipated that co-workers would not read emails or that they would claim they never received them. Beverly behaved proactively by sending read requests with her emails and by saving documentation. Jane also described anticipating future problems with a new system at work:

> I knew there were going to be a lot of questions about it and we had a brand new assignment that a lot of people didn't really know much about. So I actually created a short video that I was able to walk them through and say, "Here's where you find…" because a lot of people were new to the system.

Jane's example clearly shows that she anticipated problems with the new system and proactively responded by creating a explanation video. Gwen described a similar experience of anticipating issues relating to communication. In this example, Gwen described teaching a co-worker about procedures for email communication. She was teaching the co-worker based on her previous experience and an anticipation of a future problem. Gwen, on teaching the co-worker, said:

> Well, I've learned the hard way and I'm trying to teach Matt too, as Jackie has described, CCing everybody. If anybody and everybody could be involved in this whole issue, put them on the email, start that paper trail immediately.

Gwen anticipated future events based on her previous experience. When asked to explain in more detail why to copy people on email communication, Gwen provided an example of communicating with her boss on projects. Gwen said “Basically, it was a mixture, I think, of insight and anticipation.” Gwen further added, “[it was] just anticipating his needs. So like maybe Doug will ask him about this or maybe this will come up in a meeting and he needs to justify why I spent $500 on t-shirts.” Gwen’s experience taught her the importance of copying people on emails, but it also taught her to anticipate the possible needs of her boss. By communicating numerous amounts of information, Gwen felt she would prevent problems. For Gwen copying co-workers on emails was so important that she felt a co-worker would face serious consequences if he did not follow the standard. Gwen stated, “Like I said, poor Matt needs to learn how to CC everybody or he's going to get burned.”

These examples provide evidence of participants anticipating future events and modifying behaviors in response to this anticipation. Also important in regards to anticipation is the ability to have a future focus orientation. Future focus moves beyond just anticipation. Anticipation is the expectation that certain events or outcomes will occur. Anticipation is based on the concept of prediction, which considers what will occur in a given situation. Future focus is a consideration of long term goals with a focus on future events and outcomes. Marshall provided an example of such future focus when discussing teaching co-workers in way that considers long term goals. Marshall shared:

> When I first got into management, my first instinct would be go down there and fix it and then I don't have to worry about it. Over time you understand that if you can get that person to understand what went wrong and how they could've fixed it, then you'll have less problems in the future. So that's kind of what I do, I just go and identify opportunities and try and figure out how I can convey to whoever could've made that better, how they could've done that differently.

In this example Marshall considers the future and changes his approach to the issue based on future goals. In addition, Marshall tries to get subordinates to identify issues and to think about future consequences.

Another interesting example from a participant appears, at first, non-proactive. In this example, however, Morgan considered future events and anticipated a flood of forthcoming phone calls about an issue. For Morgan the future focus can be seen in his efforts to make employees learn a new system. His decision stemmed from a desire to avoid numerous complaints about the system. On interacting with co-workers, Morgan said:

> No, I am, "Go read it. You'll find it on that." Because I found that I was, I would know how to do this. I would know what to do with this, but I was getting the phone calls all day. I was getting the text messages all day, "Hey, did you see this?" or "How do you do this?" We were getting the notifications on, "Hey, what is this?" So it was, all right, when they first started the SAS/Connect, they didn't have a search feature in it which was fine but the thing was, "Hey, it's in SAS/Connect. Go find it. I'm not going to tell you where it is. Go find it."

Beverly also demonstrated an orientation towards future goals by raising the issue of an overburdened co-worker in hopes that it would result in another person being hired. Beverly said:

> A lot of people probably are overworked and they probably do have a lot on their plate, but I don't feel like my area is any less important than other areas that you have, especially like I said, with the website. I don't have control over that. I did my end. You need to do your end. The other thing is I feel like, well, if I copy your boss and you're obviously constantly behind, maybe your boss will go, "Oh, maybe we should hire somebody else because clearly this person has more work than they have time to do." That probably doesn't happen but I guess it potentially could.

Beverly hopes that her proactive communication will result in another employee being hired to cover a workload. This action focus on future events. Gwen further illustrates this point through her consideration of the long term goals of her department. Gwen when discussing communicating so much information with her boss stated:

> I started CCing the VP of HR on some of our company-wide challenges, like health challenges, like our Fitbit challenge so he could know, "Hey, I'll bring this to Buddy, our CEO, because this is happening. How cool is that? (This department) is bringing all the stores into a challenge." So even to give my supervisor's supervisor some ammunition about what's going on in his area of the business.

Gwen uses the CCing strategy as way to improve to communication with her supervisors about her current position. This communication is done with a consideration of her position and the future longevity of her position in the business. She is thinking about long term goals because she is making sure that supervisors and the CEO know the value of her position within the business.

Being Careful and Planning for the Action

The second stage in the proactive process is planning for the action. This finding aligns with the literature laid out in the literature review that proposed individuals plan for the behavior. This planning may consider numerous personal or work related goals. In addition, individuals may consider consequences associated with proactive behavior. To mitigate consequences, individuals may plan behaviors and take steps to be careful in their actions. Findings suggest that individuals were careful when carrying out proactive behavior and considered several goals and consequences associated with the action.

Ted revealed the need for carefulness when being pushy or repeatedly asking for things from co-workers. In this example, Ted discussed his efforts to balance the need to get his job done while also carefully choosing his tactics. Ted said:

> I have learned through my work here and actually in other positions that I've had in the past, the line between persistence and pest and, if need be, to advance the missions of our organization, I'll walk right up to that line. I don't cross it but they know that I'm persistent and the good part of that, the contract we have is that's what they want me to do.

In this example, Ted realizes that he needs to be careful not to cross a line, which may have negative consequences for him.

Betsy provided an example of how she would carefully consider the message she was sending when contacting people about donations. She said:

> I feel like I try to, I probably put too much time into crafting the perfect email that is asking without asking too much or just dropping hints, which is ill communication, or just like, "Oh, I'll contact them and then they'll remember", that kind of weird stuff.

Betsy tries to be non direct in her communication, so she does not come across as too demanding. She tries to craft emails that are not demanding, but imply what she needs. Betsy further explained this interesting form of communication saying "I think we play that game a lot with people. All it is is a game. We don't want to say, 'You didn't send us that damn check.'" Betsy further explained why she had to play this game, remarking "…little sneaky ways. That's a terrible way to get a check to come in, but sometimes I don't know if there's a better tactic or you don't want to step on people's toes or be too pushy." This example illustrates that Betsy felt the need to be mindful of how she was asking for donations; she did not want to cross a line.

Other participants discussed how they would choose certain methods of communication. In these examples, participants reported carefully considering the means of communication and possible outcomes associated with the form of communication. Beverly explained how when faced with an organizational issue, she would reserve certain methods for high priority work. In this example Beverly is discussing copying a co-worker's boss on an email. This example was in response to a time when Beverly could not get the co-worker to respond or to complete the task. When asked whether she would use this tactic often Beverly said:

> If you do it all the time, it's not valuable. So yeah, most of the time just if I really need something to get done, which is usually for the website, I really need it to get done because it's the website.

Beverly recognized that if she used this tactic every time, it would lose its effectiveness. Therefore, she carefully plans for when to use this behavior. Beverly is considering the goals, reserving this tactic for important issues.

In other examples, participants were more concerned with the method of communication and outcomes associated with each one. Lily was concerned with how emails would come across and felt face-to-face conversations would be more clear. Lily stated, “I think that's where sometimes email can come across as being a demand of somebody.” Lily further explained that in person meetings prevented confusion and hurt feelings, saying:

> So I want to make sure in person with all the parties involved that are there, that we just list ‘This is what's going on’ and make sure that we just keep it factually-based and make sure that the roles are kept in line. I think that's another thing is where roles are blurred because it's not something someone deals with often.

In this example Lily carefully considered the consequences of her actions, and based on this consideration, she planned an action to, hopefully, prevent confusion or hard feelings. Lily further illustrated this by explaining how she deals with situations where communication has broken down. Lily discussed how she needed to change the form of communication when there are issues over email:

> So that's when I typically change because I don't want anybody's emotions to get any more involved in it because we're just working. We're just trying to do our job and so whatever people need, sometimes you need to step back from whatever form that is and make sure there's no further communication that would accidentally be insulting to somebody, whether they were incorrect about something or if they were misunderstood

> or were snappy. It's sometimes not good to answer back because then it can be taken as a battle.

Lily recognizes that a disagreement and hard feelings may result if she has chosen to further engage co-workers over email. She chooses to take a step back and consider other forms of communication, such as the face-to-face method mentioned above.

Morgan explained that he would consider the person he is communication with and plan the approach around that person. Morgan said "So you've adapted to each person. You realize different approaches work for different people." Morgan further explained this by sharing a story where he had a co-worker call in sick and needed someone to cover the shift. Morgan explained that he did not want to text the co-worker but needed instead to have a phone conversation with him:

> I try to reserve calling for when I need to have that verbal communication. I want to pick up on, I want to ask you if you're going to do this and I want the tones and the hints of, "Are you going to actually do this or are you going to half-ass this and then I'll have to do the rest when I get in?"

Morgan choose a phone call because he could learn information from the tones and hints of the conversation. If Morgan chose a text message, he would not receive this additional information. Morgan planned this form of communication.

Jennifer discussed how she would correct a problem with communication, "I would just do it face-to-face because I feel like tone is really hard in email. I don't want to come across as a bitch and also I know the girls in HR really well." Jennifer tailors the channel of communication to what is best for meeting her goals, which is effective while also maintaining a friendly tone.

In addition to considering the form of communication, participants also reported planning the best timing for communication. For Danny being careful about when to communicate was important. Danny discussed how he would wait for an appropriate time to go by a co-worker's desk. Danny said:

> Sometimes, we have busy lights, so you can kind of see if someone is busy. If someone is busy, I may try not to go by but what I'll do is if I go to the door, I wait for them to kind of finish a thought before I kind of knock or that kind of thing. Or if someone's typing an email, I may come back. If someone's sitting at their desk maybe writing or reading something, I may feel a little less, I guess, I won't feel as bad about maybe interrupting or kind of just popping in.

Danny tries to make sure that he does not interrupt co-workers and wants to make ensure that he chooses the right time to approach someone. This finding demonstrates that individuals may choose an appropriate time to address an issue.

Overall, participants reported carefully crafting messages, selectively choosing the perfect moment for communication, selecting certain means or forms of communication, and many other behaviors that reflect the need to plan and be careful in one's behavior. Throughout this section, it becomes apparent that individuals do not just take action but consider the complexities of each situation. Participants weighed their desired ends against the possible ramifications of each action. In some cases, participants chose different methods of communication to avoid negative ramifications.

Age

Another factor that influences proactive employee communication planning was the age of the recipient of communication. Findings suggest that individuals will take into account the age of the person they are communicating with and consider how that factor may influence the preferred or best action.

Robin was sharing how she would approach co-workers if she needed to discuss an issue right away. Robin was asked if she would email co-workers that were older and said, “No, I get up and talk to them. They're not online as often because of the age difference. So I will get up.” Robin realized that, for certain age groups, face-to-face communication was better. Robin further explain that she had learned from previous experience that older generations dislike certain forms of communication. Robin explained her perspective on older co-workers:

> They'll be more likely to pick up the phone and call. They don't text and they all have smartphones. Our company pays for our phones. Yeah, no, they're all computer savvy because of their jobs but they don't like that kind of communication.

Robin’s case is fascinating because the older worker knew how to use other forms of communication but still preferred face-to-face or phone calls. This finding demonstrates one factor that influences the choice of behaviors for employees. If employees know that one type of communication will not be useful, they will choose a more effective method suited to those involved in the interaction.

Action

The last stage in proactive process is that action taken by individuals. Literature in the area of proactive behaviors outlines actions that seek to improve the circumstances and require individuals to take control of a situation (Crant, 2000; Bindle & Parker, 2011). Participants reported a number of different actions when trying to take control and improve communication in their workplace. Several participants reported that one large workplace communication issue occurred when co-workers failed to respond to participants in a timely manner. In these situations, participants felt the need to take control of the situation. Cindy said:

> Well, for instance, that one particular person doesn't respond in a timely manner and doesn't even seem to be bothered by it, but I'm the type of person that if I don't get an answer, I just walk right up to her desk and ask. I just say, “Hey, you got a minute? I've got this problem. I know I sent you an email on it. Hadn't heard anything. I really need an answer.

Cindy’s example illustrate that employees take action to regain control of situation and to reach a desired end result. Other participants also reported that, in some circumstances, they need to take action to make communication more timely. These participants would also take control of the situation by communicating again with an individual. Beverly reported “Like I said before, if it's important and I know they haven't answered the email, I'll try and call them. Or what I sometimes do is I email them again. Like I forward the email.” Beverly described how she would send the previous email to show the individual the amount of time she had waited and to provide proof of the transaction.

Other participants used other forms of communication to resolve the communication issue. Lily said “There's some things that may be a little more nuanced or urgent where I will add a phone call to that but it's typically in addition to an email or I'll call and then email.” Ted reported using alternative forms of communication when having urgent issues. Ted would text his boss when he needed something:

> I've found, if you can imagine, that the most efficient way to communicate with him, especially if we're needing something on a tight deadline, is a text message. I have his

> cellphone number in my cellphone and he has mine and sometimes I'll say, “Hey, we just really have to have this.”

Betsy echoed similar approaches when having issues communicating to individuals. Betsy said “I tend to want to just keep bothering them. [Laughter] I know that's not necessarily, everyone here doesn't think it's the right tactic. It's like strategically keep bothering them.” When asked to further explain how she would strategically bother them Betsy said:

> We'll wait a few days. We'll try calling. We'll send an email. Then sometimes we just quit bothering but how are you supposed to get things done if you're not – I just want to keep, “Where are you? Why aren't you responding?”

Jane also reported using other channels of communication to reach co-workers. Jane discussed communication issues when dealing with a coworker:

> I've even talked to Patty about this and she said, “Well, have you tried to contact him on Facebook?” and sometimes I do. It might be work-related but if they're not responding to my email, I might say “Hey, by the way, did you get that email?” I don't always like doing that but sometimes I have done it because if I see they're posting photos and stuff.

Jane resolved to using unconventional forms of communication not typically utilized for workplace communication. Other participants reported using more personal approaches to resolving communication issues. Ted stated:

> Many of those individuals will have multiple emails that will stack up and just to help remind them, you know, a friendly visit and, oh, they see Ted coming and know, “That's right. He sent me this package to review this morning,” that's just a way to remind them.

Ted further noted that he follows a procedure to handle situations where he does not get results. Ted said:

> I don't hear anything back in a reasonable amount of time, I will often follow up with a phone call or, more likely because we're all in close proximity, I might just walk over and say, “Hey, did you have a chance to take a look at that?” Again, sort of a two-step process, email first and then a personal contact follow-up.

Overall participants reported using different actions to get desired outcomes when initial communication did not achieve the desired result. These findings demonstrate that when faced with communication issues in the workplace, individuals will use various actions to attain a desired result. The preceding actions by individuals demonstrate the concept of proactive employee communication. Individuals in each action took control of a situation to resolve the communication issue.

In addition to using different channels of communication and following up with co-workers, individuals also reported the need for a new way of doing things. Challenging current conditions and creating new ones is a key component of the definition of proactive behavior (Crant, 2000). These findings support the notion that employees enact proactive employee communication. Jane discussed an issue about sharing information with co-workers, noting how previous communication with email presented problems for the work group. Jane also discussed how co-workers did not comprehend previous messages about the new work system. Therefore, Jane concluded that a new way of disseminating information was needed and that there should be a demonstration of the new system to avoid confusion. While discussing a new online system to manage information Jane stated:

> I worked with Beth but we presented it during a work meeting and we said, “Hey, instead of sending out all these emails on the listserv and getting all these responses, it's really easy to just go online.” So we had the projector up there and the computer and we

showed them how easy it was to do to just try and do that instead of getting all these emails.

Despite a new approach to disseminating information and providing a hands on presentation, Jane still reported that co-workers had issues with the new system. So Jane decided that a video would present the information in a new way and provide co-workers with easy access to a demonstration. Jane said:

> That's why I did it, because I was starting to get emails about the same question over and over and I didn't want to send out an email to the listserv answering them. So I just thought, a video, we're supposed to be teaching digital media to our students, so I thought I should use some of the software that I'm recommending for my students to use and actually do something to maybe answer their questions so I'm not getting as many emails about things in the future.

In addition to confusing communication about a new system, Jane also faced issues with changes in the workplace, resulting in numerous questions about how to operate on a daily basis. Jane recognized that email was not the best form of communication to handle these questions. Jane and a work colleague decided there was a better way to handle questions:

> We had this woman, a faculty lecturer, she literally emailed me a list of, I'm not kidding you, 25 questions about every single thing on the syllabus. Basically every week she went through, "What's this? What examples should I give for this? What reading should I do?" Just so many questions and it was in January, yeah, so she wanted me to respond to all these questions and I just, she emailed me but then she copied Patty on it and I can remember talking to Patty and saying, "I don't have time to respond to all of those. We need to have a face-to-face interaction because it would take me forever." That's when

> we decided to do the open office hours several times throughout the spring and she came to the first one and literally asked pretty much every question but it wasn't just me having to respond. There were other people in the room who had taught it in the Fall and they could give her some feedback as well.

In this example, the new approach was holding office hours, where the co-worker could have a face-to-face interaction and spark dialogue with other co-workers about the issue. This example illustrates that individuals may need to establish new ways of communicating a message. In the early examples, participants reported using different forms of communication but were basically sending the same message each time. In these more recent examples with Jane and colleagues, they required an innovative form of communication that challenged the current status quo of communication. Jane was able to challenge the normal ways of communicating such as presentations and emails. Jane, by creating a demonstration video and holding offices hours, found an innovative way to communicate, which allowed discussion beyond the basic messages offered via email or presentation.

Another participant, Lily, also discussed having to implement new procedures to help resolve communication issues. Lily said:

> I have instated biweekly conference calls with distributors based on issues with them not giving me all the information I need or them getting all the information I send them or things like that or keeping us all on the same page about when orders are leaving, when they're coming, just what their role would be to their customer and to their customer's company.

Other participants reported similar experiences when requiring a new way of operating. Peter discussed how customers would call the incorrect number for customer service and that co-workers were not required to answer those calls. Despite the dictates of employee protocol, Peter recommended a different approach, telling a co-worker "Dude, just, if they call you four times, I understand. Just call them back and tell them to call the number." Jennifer also reported that new procedures may not be approved by management but that action was nonetheless needed. In this case, Jennifer discussed a call log that would provide information about customer issues. Jennifer could not get management to meet or to sign off, so she took initiative to create a new procedure for handling the call log and communication around the customer issue. Jennifer stated:

> So I rescheduled three times and then I said "Forget it" and Pete, who's my boss's boss asked me when I was going to talk to the guys about the call log and what the new procedure was and I said, "That would be when someone decides on what the new procedure should be." So I took it upon myself in that situation to come up with my own procedure because no one was giving me any direction.

Participants also reported instances where communication was unclear and they took action to correct confusion. Robin discussed an employee that uses passive aggressive communication and often sends unclear emails. When asked how she responds, Robin reported "I reiterate what she says. I will go to her office and say, 'Hey, I just got this email from you and I don't really understand what you mean' and then make her explain it to me. Honestly, that's what I do." For Robin she felt like a straightforward approach of directly asking her work colleague solved the communication issue at hand. Robin did not leave things as they were but took control by directly asking the person about the issue at hand. Danny reported a similar approach to Robin when communication was not clear. Danny decided to "Ask questions. I'll ask questions that require a lot of detail and a lot of response. So if someone asks a very broad question, I'll make sure I ask some questions that require a lot of thought and detail." Lily also reported the use of tactics to clear up confusion, stating:

> I guess I'm thinking more of instances where I feel like a point hasn't been getting across through email or phone and, a lot of times, a face-to-face meeting is definitely not a punishment or anything, it's like "Let's meet. Let's make sure everybody's all on the same page on this."

Overall, these examples demonstrate how individuals took action to correct perceived communication issues in the workplace. The examples provided demonstrate that proactive employee communication exists in the workplace. Furthermore, the examples provided align with the literature on proactive behavior, which proposes that individuals will take control of a situation to get a desired end result. Some of the examples provided also illustrate that individuals will create new and innovative ways to handle perceived communication problems in the workplace. Taking action to improve conditions or to create new ones is crucial to the definition of proactive behaviors (Crant, 2000).

Keeping a record

An interesting finding of this study was that participants reported using email as a way to keep a record and to "cover their butts." This finding not only supports the notion that individuals anticipate events, plan for the future, and take action, but the finding also demonstrates the process of proactive communication. Participants showed a proclivity for using email when anticipating negative outcomes because of the possible need for proof or a record of these communications in the future. When participants anticipate negative outcomes, they planned the action of saving large amounts of records. Participants also reported using email as way to stay organized and to keep track of material. Interestingly, participants preferred using email over other forms of communication because it kept a paper trail.

When discussing the excessive use of email Cindy said “I don't know if they do more than me but they do as much as me. Everybody emails. A lot of people call it CYA”. Further discussing the usage of email Cindy said:

> You want a paper trail. You want a paper trail a lot of times because things can come back and bite you, especially when you're talking to people and, it happens a lot, “I talked to so-and-so and she told me” or “He told me this” and if you've got it documented

In this example, Cindy anticipates that the lack of a paper trail could lead to negative consequences. Cindy’s experience with co-workers using unofficial forms of communication further illustrates the importance of keeping a paper trail. Cindy discussed how co-workers have the illusion that they are avoiding a paper trail stating “Some people have the illusion. I save them because I have had to CYA so much. A lot of it is talking about maybe a particular case or something. They may have IMed [Instant Messaged] me instead of emailed me.”

Beverly described a similar experience of using email to keep a recording when anticipating future negative consequences:

> Then that way, I save them and that way when they inevitably tell me they didn't get the email or don't know what I'm talking about, I can send it to them and be like, “Nope, you said you got it. You said you read it.” I do a lot of CYA just because you kind of have to.

Betsy also described using email to keep a paper trail stating “Yeah, then I'm terrified of like… not having documentation of a conversation.” Gwen described how email provided comfort, stating “people really like the comfort of a paper trail.” For these participants, email served the purpose of keeping a record of communication and to prevent the problems associated with a lack of documentation.

Jane discussed how email not only provided a record of communication but made it more official. Jane described having a conservation with a co-worker:

> Yeah but something formal, she'll even say, "You had a conversation with me. Now put it in an email." That way she has a record of it. Your request for something or, "I want to go to this conference. Is there any money to support that?", she might say, "I think there is but let me talk to Paul. Go ahead and put that in an official email.

Jane's experience is interesting because even though email lacks context clues it carries a more official tone because it can be kept and reviewed later.

Other participants noted that email's utility moved beyond a paper trail. Peter said "I like emails, personally, because I can go back and search for them and reread it, and it's more organized than I would be normally. I'm not a very organized person. I like email because it's always there". Beverly described a similar experience of using email as an organizational tool. Beverly said:

> I never delete my deleted email folder and I save a copy of every email that I send, so that way if I ever need to go back and look something up, it's very easy to just search sent, deleted, or inbox and pretty much we're going to find it.

Both Beverly and Peter anticipate the need to find emails in the future and prefer the organizational utility of email.

Lily also discussed how email could be useful when complex information is shared. Lily, when discussing the large amount of email communication stated:

> Documentation, I think part of it's, you know, someone might not be able to get to it right that second. So it allows a message to be left. It's checked more often than voicemail messages. Voicemails are way less frequently used than they used to be. So it's just a quick way for somebody to visually see something, flag it, prioritize it, and they're not having to take note of it because it's already noted and it's documented. I think documentation of something or having a paper trail is important in certain matters or sometimes it's sort of a technical thing to communicate and involves numbers and pictures and email is the best way to portray all that.

Similarly, Danny shared an experience describing how email could be useful because it gives people time to comprehend information and compose a response. Danny when discussing email said:

> Yes. It can be overwhelming but I think it's still a good way because it's there and you can't forget what was said and you can include who needs to be included and sometimes it helps when people have time to think about a response.

Gwen also felt that emailing not only provided a record but could enhance understanding:

> So I never thought of that before. So having proof that this follow-up happened and my boss did say this is the way we're going with this; just having that extra confirmation and the dual understanding. So if you have a conversation, you follow-up with an email to outline everything you discussed. So it's very heavily reliant upon frequent email communication.

Overall, these example demonstrate that participants anticipated future events and used email communication in response to that anticipation. For some participants, they anticipated questions in regards to their workplace activities, and email provided evidence of certain actions.

Other participants reported that they were less organized and anticipated the possibility of losing material. For these participants, email served an organizational function and a record keeping purpose. Participants also noted that they received numerous emails and that CCing was sometimes over done, yet they admitted to continuing this practice for fear of negative consequences stemming from miscommunication.

A small number of participants reported that having a record was not always preferred. These participants reported using communication tools that would be kept off the record or used for unofficial communication. Cindy said "IM [Instant Messenger] is not automatically saved. So a lot of people IM if they don't want a paper trail. That's very common." Jane also shared that communication should not always be on record:

> Sometimes the communication that we do on Facebook and text is, how do I say it, it's about work but it's not something you would want to be written in an email. Maybe there's someone who has applied for a new job or I don't want to say gossip but something that you really wouldn't want to be in an official document and form of communication, like "Oh, did you hear about this?"

Jane felt the need to use unofficial forms of communication that her organization could not access. This was similar to Cindy's example, in which co-workers used instant messenger to prevent a paper trail. These examples illustrate that despite using email to have a paper trail, employees also consider possible future events where they would not want a paper trail. Clearly evidencing that employees consider the long term consequences of having a paper trail.

Getting the Job Done

Interestingly, participants rarely viewed their behavior as proactive. Instead, findings suggest that participants felt that their behaviors were required to successfully perform their jobs.

However, most participants noted their behaviors were outside the norm and were not a part of their role, which clearly makes their behavior proactive. Participants also noted that they were less concerned with the consequences of stepping out of line and more concerned with getting the job done. When Cindy was asked about concerns over badgering people, she responded with "Not any that I am concerned with. [Laughter] As long as I get my stuff done." Beverly shared a similar experience when asked about concerns over her behaviors:

> They might not like you, but I don't really care. I need to do my job. I feel like if you did your job two weeks ago when I asked you to, then I wouldn't have to email your boss.

Beverly was not concerned with what co-workers thought of her actions because she was more more concerned with getting the job done. Ted's account resembled that of Beverly's when discussing how he would often question people about events related to his job. Ted shared that, for him, it was about doing his job, "Sometimes they chuckle and say, 'There's Ted again. He's asking questions.' But they want me to do that, they pay me to do that, and that's my role there." Along those same lines, Danny, when discussing whether his actions were part of his role, said:

> I think it's above and beyond. However, I mean, at the end of the day, you do what you need to do to get the job done. So it's not part of my job description but I think what's expected of the quality for our group is you do what you need to do to get the job done.

Other participants shared similar opinions when discussing what would make them take action to correct a problem. Jane said:

> I think when it's affecting the ability of me to do my job in a timely manner, when I feel that I don't have access to enough information and the correct information, when it somehow is disruptive to my schedule or even my students, if I feel that there's something that is happening that needs to change because I need to inform them in some

> way. I guess that would be the biggest thing. Going back to the email, if you reply all, that doesn't affect me, it doesn't bother me. I just delete the email. But if there's some other issue going on that I feel we're not getting the correct information about or I'm not going to know how to make a decision, then that would be a time

Jane's description emphasizes that participants would take action to correct the problem when they felt it would inhibit their ability to perform. Lily described a similar experience about when to take action, stating "If what needs to happen isn't getting done or isn't getting done effectively, that's kind of my job…to communicate effectively between one group and my organization." These findings demonstrate that employees frequently engage in behaviors that are not a part of their position but are needed to perform their jobs. Furthermore, employees appear to have less concern about going outside their role and more concern with completing their work.

Getting Another Person Involved

An interesting finding of this study was that when enacting proactive behaviors participants often times reported that they usually involve another person in the action. This is a crucial finding because previous literature does not consider how individuals may include a co-worker in proactive behavior. Some participants reported getting another person involved to solve organizational issues. Other participants reported being pulled into a work situation to assist with an organizational issue. At times participants reported offering advice, guidance, and support to a co-worker seeking to remedy an issue. Cindy described an experience with a co-worker:

> We've got a couple that are brand new just to our whole company and one of them's a little bit braver than the other, but they'll learn. A lot of them come to me because I'm the

> veteran or a couple of the other, two or three of the other people who have been there a long time too. They'll come to us first and say, “What do you think I ought to do?”

Cindy further explained how she would offer advice about this issue to co-workers:

> Mm-hmm and if I feel like it's only been like a couple of weeks or something, I'd say “Well, shoot an email first,” say “Just a friendly reminder, checking on status, have you had time to look at this yet?” You have to be polite and tactful. Being bold and aggressive are two different things. We're not aggressive about it. I just figure if they see my name and that email popped up enough, they might want to do it to get it off their plate. They might want to get rid of me. [Laughter]

This example provides insight into how and why co-workers may choose to involve another person. In this example, the co-worker was unsure how to handle the situation and chose to involve a co-worker before taking action. Robin shared a similar experience that involved a difficult co-worker. Robin was brought into an issue with a co-worker by another employee. Robin said “I have had other team members come to me and say, ‘Hey, can you take care of this?’ and yeah, I will.” Cindy also shared how she would get pulled into issues to help out co-workers. In this example, Cindy discussed she would help out co-workers:

> If they get the phone call and say, “Oh, this person doesn't want to pay. They said they can't pay the money. I don't know how to tell him or her what to do, work out some kind of payment or something,” I say, “Well, I'm glad to sit next to you while you talk to them.” Because they need to learn.

Cindy further explained that co-workers looked to her to handle difficult situations, saying “they say, ‘Give it to…’ me. ‘She can handle it. She'll tell them like it is.’” In these examples, participants are using another member to help solve the problem.

Participants also reported involving another person by copying them on emails. The practice of copying a boss or co-worker serves as a way to resolve the organizational issue. In many ways, the participants saw this as a way of "telling on co-workers" to get results. Cindy said that she knew other people used this tactic, "I know one other of my coworkers has actually copied the person's boss before to try to get a response and it works." Beverly shared a similar experience:

> Like I said before, if it's important and I know they haven't answered the email, I'll try and call them. Or what I sometimes do is I email them again. Like I forward the email or reply all and I'll either copy their boss or copy my boss or both to try to get more of a response. I knew, I've been there like a year, but my boss has been there 26, so I've noticed before, if I haven't gotten a response and then I copy my boss, I immediately get a response because she's a director. So her name carries more weight than mine.

Beverly, efforts to publish material on the company website, continued:

> So, typically they're really bad about responding and/or updating, and a lot of times it's stuff that is time sensitive, and I needed it to happen two weeks ago when I emailed you and it still hasn't happened. So in that case, I would email my boss and her boss at the same time and be like, "Hi, I sent this to you a couple weeks ago. I checked the website today and I noticed that it still hadn't been changed. It's kind of sensitive. Can you please make sure that this gets changed in the next day or so?" Then usually if I do that, oh boom, it's changed. So sometimes I don't know if it's because they forget or they're like, "Oh, they're just not as important as all these other things I have to do" but like I said, if I do my boss or their boss, that usually gets more of a response, especially if it's their boss because they're like, "Shit, now my boss knows I didn't do something."

Beverly involved her boss and another co-worker's boss to achieve her desired results, which was often as simple as an email response or the completion of a menial task. Peter had a similar experience, but in his case, he was the one being told on by a co-worker. Peter when discussing his manager said:

> When she's pissed and wants to basically tell on me, she'll write me a really angry email like, "You need to do this. You need to do this better or that" and then she'll copy everyone on it, not everyone, but people who, I guess, she wants to know that I fucked up on something. So that's what she does. That's her really passive-aggressive thing.

Similarly, Lily involved a supervisor when she encountered a problem she could not address alone. Lily described her case:

> My supervisor and department head are very great in this relationally because they understand and they're aware and they know to probably maybe even be the one to communicate it instead of me sometimes. So maybe it has to go maybe not directly from me but add in a step of another person that it has to go through, which isn't always preferred, but sometimes it's just the better way to deal with some things because it's not going to be taken the wrong way. It's going to come from a point of the proper authority that maybe certain people need. They need to understand that this is important and this is their role.

When asked to further explain the circumstances in which she would involve a supervisor, Lily said "if it's something I really absolutely need and all my avenues of communication haven't worked, that's when the supervisor would step in."

Jennifer shared two comparable experiences where she felt it necessary to bring in a supervisor. In the following examples, Jennifer was upset by how co-workers were communicating with her. She did not appreciate comments or attitudes in their communication, and she described her response:

> Like for instance, one of my project managers at one point said something to me, I don't remember what he said, he just said it in a tone that he was like talking down to me, like "You're just our secretary. You have to do whatever we say" da, da, da. It was something along those lines. So I stood up for myself in that instance but that would be an instance where I would feel comfortable going to, it was one of Vernon's guys, I would feel comfortable going to Vernon and saying to him, "I really don't appreciate Sam saying that to me and treating me like that."

In this example Jennifer involved a supervisor in hopes that it would help fix the situation. Jennifer shared another experience about dealing with a co-worker over email. In this instance, Jennifer was trying to get responses about the timeline for a project. Jennifer described the interaction with her coworker:

> She sent me this really nasty email about how I had inquired about the status of a help desk ticket that I'd put in a month ago about its job folder boxes or whatever. So there's this whole new system of entering them into SharePoint and then they get put in this big file room or whatever. So I asked what the status was and she sent me this email back about how SharePoint comes after everything she does for Bob and Mark and "If that's not fast enough for you, Jennifer, then I'm sorry but we can't all be…" I don't remember what she said. Anyway, it was just a bitchy email and I printed it out and put it on Pete's desk and said, "I don't need to work with someone like that and I don't need to have anybody sending me these nasty emails. I just want you to be aware that her attitude is not appreciated because all I did was ask, 'Hey, what's the status on the job folder

> boxes?'" She's one of those people who's had it out with pretty much every woman at work.

Jennifer went to her supervisor in hopes of avoiding unpleasant future encounters with her co-worker. For these participants, involving a co-worker or a supervisor was used as a means to improve the current situation. Some employees involved co-workers to seek advice while others used their status as a supervisor to achieve an end result. Moreover, some used co-workers to express grievances with the hopes of improving circumstances.

Factors that Influence the Proactive Process

Proactivity is a complex process that can be influenced by a number of factors. Research examining proactive behaviors has only begun to scratch the surface of the various organizational factors that influence proactivity. The findings of this study provide evidence and further enhance our understanding of the complexity of proactivity. This next section will explore several factors that influence proactivity for employees. For participants in this study, these factors could encourage, prohibit, or prevent proactive behaviors. These findings align with current proactive behavior literature, which suggests that proactivity is a process and not a simple action. These findings also provide an account of what employees consider when engaging in proactivity.

Physical Space and Geographic Location

One important finding of this study was that physical office space and geographic location influence proactive employee communication. This obvious factor is one that has been explored by researchers (Pepper, 2008). However, the consideration of physical space and geographic location has not been examined in proactive behaviors literature. The findings here suggest that physical space may encourage proactive behaviors and geographic dispersion may hinder communication.

Ted described his workplace and how it allowed him to easily get up and talk to people in the group. Throughout the interview, Ted discussed stopping by or visiting co-workers to serve as a reminder that he needed something from them. Ted said “The great thing about that L shape that you described is you can visit two or three people in close proximity and do it very quickly and very efficiently and we have gotten very good at that.” Danny said his office had an open concept and that the spaced allowed him to communicate with individuals. Danny added, “The majority is probably face-to-face. Because we're in the same location, then it's a lot easier to just have a conversation as opposed to sending emails. Plus, I like to have more face-to-face if possible.” Danny further described the office space:

> Yes, because we have open concept, we have busy lights. So it’s a light that goes on top of your computer, so from far away, you can see if it’s red, then they’re busy or in a meeting. If it’s green, it’s kind of like saying, “Hey, I’m available.”

In this example Danny explained that the busy lights were added later in the construction of the office space because people were disrupting each other so much. In this example, it is clear that the layout of the office influence communication styles.

Cindy discussed how her direct co-workers were close by, saying “We stand up and, ‘I can't believe that phone call!’, you know? So yeah.” For Cindy this allowed her to easily discuss organizational issues with co-workers in her group. Cindy further explained that if the issue involved someone outside her work group, then she could easily have a face-to-face conversation within the department. Cindy said:

> Yeah, we're not in offices, we're in cubes. We're out in the open. It's close enough for me to just walk right over there and I do. So I have a good relationship. I feel comfortable enough to walk up to anybody in the whole benefits organization.

Betsy shared a similar story about how close offices allowed her to easily talk with co-workers when working to resolve issues. Betsy said:

> Yes. I've actually been in this office for six months. I was up in that front hallway, so then it was just roll your chair and scream across the hall kind of thing which was nice because it's so constant, I have to move around.

Overall, participants reported that being close in proximity to co-workers allowed them to have more face-to-face discussions and to more easily resolve organizational issues. In addition it appears that, based on the set up of the office space, it was part of the norm to approach co-workers face-to-face.

Other participants reported similar stories of how physical location and space influences communication between co-workers. These participants discussed what it was like for colleagues or for themselves when they were not in close proximity to co-workers.

Jane shared an experience of being moved to a new office where she was close to her co-workers. Jane also shared the experience of an isolated co-worker still stuck in another office further way. Jane said:

> I've been moved around a lot and we now are side by side and I like that because there's a lot of times I have a basic question and we're also colleagues because we're teaching the same courses and things like that. So sometimes I'd go to her and go, “Hey, what are you doing for this day?”

Jane explained that one of her colleagues sat in a different building and preferred to be closer for communication reasons. Jane explained:

> In fact one of my colleagues has a much bigger office and nicer space but she doesn't like where she's at. The building I'm in is called Smith Building. So she'll say, "I wish I could be in Smith because I feel that I miss so much of what's happening and the communication" because she's not there face-to-face. I know I felt that way the past few years because my office just moved to Smith a little over a year ago. It was kind of nice at times to be off on your own. That way if you didn't show up for everything, it wasn't a big deal. "Oh, she's over there." "Her classes are across campus." But I like being there just more for the face-to-face.

The worker in this example gave up the perks of the other building to be closer to workers for communication reasons.

Lily shared a similar story, discussing how communication was influenced by space. Lily said "I think location of the physical person is important to know and understand." Lily further explained that her organization has two buildings located a few blocks away. Lily said:

> The communication can break down, especially if someone's having to be walking back and forth or between the locations or, I don't know, maybe they haven't told someone they're coming over to another building and nobody knows where they are. I feel like things like that are where communication breaks down or maybe a communication has been sent out but it's only been maybe displayed in one place as a sign or a notification and they forgot about all the other places that it may need to be displayed or read because…typically, we're in a building that's not the main building, so we kind of feel like we're left out a little bit sometimes as far as what's going on.

Lily's story demonstrates how disparate physical locations can lead to communication breakdowns and may influence chosen communication strategies. Lily noted that the back-and-forth between buildings could be problematic, which may influence the proactive tactics used by individuals.

In most cases, close proximity of physical space seems like an intuitive advantage for an organization; however, Mindy's experiences point out an advantage to geographically dispersed locations as she works with people spread out across the United States. Mindy used her inability to have face-to-face conversations as a way to dictate when and how to communicate. Mindy said:

> I don't really get annoyed or argue with people. It's probably because I'm not seeing people as often as I could be. There are a couple of them that I butt heads with but it's nothing that can be resolved by just stopping the conversation and picking it up another time or completely avoiding it and doing it myself.

Mindy used her physical location to her advantage and found ways to use it to strategically communicate in way that she found effective.

In the previous examples, the findings demonstrate how physical location and space may influence communication. The participants' spaces influenced their ability to communicate and the tactics utilized. The next example is more complex because the physical location created a difference in the organizational culture. This difference led to different norms of communication. Jennifer discussed how her organization's communication and culture were influenced by a physical barrier: both a street and physical objects within the office. Over the course of Jennifer's interview, she said "my side of the street" and "the other side of the street" continuously. Jennifer said this about the physical location:

> So it's a little different depending, so I work with the field guys as well as the office employees. Allen has quite a few different buildings all on the same street and I'm in operations, so we are not, we call ourselves the redheaded stepchild. We don't get nice things. We get the hand-me-downs. Across the street is where the board members are. They just had a really big renovation. They get all the fancy-dancy stuff. If we wanted a white board, we had to go to the sheet metal shop and they made us one out of scrap metal but across the street, they have these beautiful green glass dry erase boards that cost like $800. It's just that kind of stuff. So it's very different. It's very informal. There's a lot of F bombs dropped in the office in my building on a constant basis.

This difference not only seems to to influence communication but also to create a different culture. Of course communication from one culture to another can be difficult. Jennifer further explained the difference between the locations and how different types of communication and norms were expected. Regarding her side of the street, Jennifer said:

> It's a very crass environment and you have to be able to kind of like hold your own with the guys. If you do not, they will walk all over you. You have to be strong-willed and opinionated. Otherwise, you'll just get walked all over. So that's kind of how it is on our side of the street. The other side of the street is much more general corporate, you know…You don't want to drop an F bomb on the other side of the street

Jennifer discussed on this difference created a barrier in communication saying:

> So when communication comes from corporate or the other side of the street, there's this huge disconnect of who your audience is and how you're speaking to them and it just, honestly, the field guys that are the guys on the roof every day and getting the job done so that I have a job and they're not treated very well. I don't know, so they try to do like

> email with those guys or the face-to-face thing but, first off, there's a language barrier and, second off, there's usually a culture barrier. The view that most of the field guys have with the people from corporate is, "Well, you've never even been on a roof, so why are you trying to tell me how to do my job?"

For the corporate side of the street, their idea of innovative communication does not match the needs of the worker on the other side of the street. Jennifer discussed how corporate tried new approaches to communication, using numerous emails and work huddles, but as Jennifer stated, this method did not mesh with the realities of the typical work day. Jennifer said:

> So it's become this thing that is supposed to be connecting people or whatever and it's just become a nuisance, unfortunately. So I would say that that, that's supposed to be a communication idea that's supposed to improve communication and improve everybody being on the same page or whatever but really, people just delete them. The problem is, I don't know if it's that way across the street because their days are not as busy as ours but we just don't have time for any of this crap.

This example may seem outside the area of proactive behaviors, but it actually provides an example of how differences in physical location can induce different approaches to proactive employee communication. Jennifer provided examples of communication with her side of the street, which were much less tactful and less formal. When attempting to fix issues with the other side of the street, Jennifer followed formal corporate norms using appointments and emails. Overall, physical location and space played an important role in proactive employee communication. For some, it made communication very easy and many participants reported using face-to-face over email.

Organizational norms

The next section of findings explores several areas that are a part of organizational norms. Organizational norms are established through experiences within the organization. Over time organizational members develop an ideal of "what ought to happen" within the organization. These findings will establish how organizational norms influence proactive employee communication. In some examples, norms will prohibit action or will cause modification to action. In other examples, respondents report that established organizational norms allow them to have more choices in proactive behavior.

Not my Place

This finding suggests that employees will consider their status within the organization when enacting proactive employee communication. In some of the examples, participants reported that they would avoid certain behaviors based on the structure of the organization and their position within the hierarchy. The structure of the organization established a formal policy of how to handle situations within the organization. Participants also reported that established cultural norms may prevent them from engaging in proactive employee communication.

Cindy provided an example that exhibits how employees feel there are invisible barriers that prevent proactive employee communication. In this example, Cindy discussed how she would avoid approaching certain people about an organizational issue. Cindy said "There's a pecking order. I wouldn't dare go above someone's head because it's frowned upon." Cindy further explained how this example was not a formal policy, but rather, it was an established norm. Cindy continued, "Okay well they say it's not frowned upon but it is. They talk the talk but they don't walk the walk." Cindy's organization actually had a policy that encouraged vertical communication about issues, but the culture of the organization ultimately prohibited this type of behavior.

Beverly shared a similar story about organizational norms and their influence on her proactive behaviors. Discussing whether or not she would address organizational problems, Beverly said:

> Yeah, maybe certain situations. It would just probably depend on, there's a lot of politics in healthcare. So it might just depend on who was involved or maybe I thought that something shouldn't have gone the way it did but it's not necessarily my place to say anything about it. You always have to be very mindful of politics.

Beverly agreed that, in certain situations, she would be proactive but that she was careful of politics. Beverly discussed in the previous example how she would handle communication issues, but even that had limitations in regards to politics. When asked to further explain work politics Beverly intimated:

> There's always politics or there's certain things you have to do or can't do because of certain people and I'm like, "Why?" "Well, because…" I'm like, "Why?" I'm new, so I'm still learning certain people that we have to cater to.

Beverly's example indicates that she still needs to learn the organizational culture but that, based on certain norms, specific behaviors are prohibited. These examples illustrate that organizational norms may dictate a certain way of handling problems.

Other examples provide evidence that proactive employee communication may be prohibited by established organizational policies. Jane shared an experience where there was an established policy of how to handle organizational issues. Jane explained that if there was a communication problem with a non-peer co-worker that she would approach a supervisor about the problem. Jane stated "that's what we were told Patty is there to do, to serve in that role of, since I'm not Tiffany's supervisor by any means, I would feel kind of awkward saying that to her." In this example, Jane is explaining how she would approach Patty to take care of a communication problem. This example was unique for Jane because she shared how she was very direct with peer co-workers, but in this case, the co-worker was not her equal.

Lily shared a similar experience, in which she felt that a supervisor would be the appropriate person to handle a communication problem. Lily said:

> I can let it go if I know it's not really in direct line with me or if I feel like someone else is going to address it. It may be not me to be the one to address every single issue communicationally within an email trail or conference call. Sometimes it may be someone else's job to step in with more expertise to clarify the situation.

Lily's examples indicate that employees may not correct all problems because they feel it is a supervisor's place to take care of a problem. For Lily she felt someone with more expertise should handle the problem. Lily further explained this situation, saying:

> I wouldn't go traipsing in and say, "You guys need to fix this" or call up another department head and say, "Why are you doing this wrong? It should be done this way." It would be more working with my supervisors to see how we could help.

Lily felt that if she were to correct the issue, she would need to do so through a supervisor.

Gwen shared a similar experience about correcting an ongoing communication problem with a co-worker, reporting:

> She and I have challenging communication problems of our own within each other, so that would be someplace where I feel like she does not communicate to her team or our boss very well. There's just a lot of lack of, it's almost like childish, petty talking. So I

> see a lot of flaws in her communication style altogether, but I don't feel like that's my place to be corrective there, does that make sense?

Gwen, when asked to explain why it was not her place, said, “I feel like something like that should come from my boss. I just don't feel comfortable or empowered to do so.” This example indicates that, despite the communication problem related directly to Gwen, she would have a supervisor correct the problem. Gwen’s impression that she is not empowered to solve the problem independently may reflect the organization’s norms or policies.

Overall, these examples indicate that employees may have to consider organizational norms and policies when taking corrective action to fix organizational communication. Furthermore, employees may need to look beyond organizational policies and ponder what is the established norm in the organization, as norms may override formal policies.

Tenure in the Organization

Another finding that relates to understanding organizational norms is the tenure of employees. The length of the employee’s tenure may influence proactivity for several reasons. First, employees with a shorter tenure may not be familiar the the norms of the organization. In this circumstance, individuals may choose to avoid behaviors or to seek the help from senior employees. Cindy shared an example of a newer employee being unfamiliar with the proper way to handle an issue. Cindy is familiar with the norms and is approached by co-workers, which she says will learn these norms over time. Cindy said:

> We've got a couple that are brand new just to our whole company and one of them's a little bit braver than the other, but they'll learn. A lot of them come to me because I'm the veteran or a couple of the other, two or three of the other people who have been there a long time too. They'll come to us first and say, “What do you think I ought to do?”

Cindy's example demonstrates how employees gradually learn the norms of handling organizational issues. Cindy further illuminated the situation by sharing how she teaches new workers to handle situations. Cindy explained that she coaches co-workers by saying:

> If I feel like it's only been like a couple of weeks or something, I'd say "Well, shoot an email first", say "Just a friendly reminder, checking on status, have you had time to look at this yet?" You have to be polite and tactful. Being bold and aggressive are two different things. We're not aggressive about it.

Cindy's story illustrates that employees mentor other employees about the proper way to handle situations. Cindy goes as far to say there is a difference between being bold and aggressive. It was apparent from her example that she is trying to teach co-workers this important difference.

Another finding was that a longer tenure in the organization coincided with the use of different tactics. Participants reported that they became bolder in the attempts to fix issues over time. Mindy shared that she was careful and very tactful when she first started her job. When asked about being careful, Mindy said:

> In the beginning I did because you were the new kid on the block and you didn't want to ruffle any feathers but now I don't care. I'll send one email and if I don't get anything back, I'll just call them and I think they're more receptive to that as opposed to getting 15 emails and then me calling them at the end of the week. So I learned my lesson.

Mindy's story demonstrates how employees learn what is acceptable over time. In Mindy's case, she learned over time that tactful emails would not work and that she could directly contact co-workers. Betsy shared a similar experience:

> I suppose I guess maybe when I first started, I didn't necessarily, wouldn't have been as naggy. So now I've kind of resolved that if I don't get a response, I'm just going to move

> on to the phone call or whatever, just go in and try to tie it up one way or the other. I think maybe I've become more comfortable…

Betsy's example illustrates that employees over time become more comfortable and adjust tactics. Overall, findings support the notion that, as employees become more familiar with the organizational norms and as they establish tenure, they may change tactics for dealing with communication issues in the workplace.

Self-interest

Another important factor that influenced proactive employee communication was self-interest. This section is composed of several areas that relate to a person's decision to enact behaviors that serve them in some way. The role of self-interest in proactive behavior is not a novel concept. Research in the area of proactive behavior has suggested that some behaviors may be to benefit the self and may be used to redefine the role of the job (Crant, 2000). In addition, research in the area of impression management suggests that individuals may use behaviors to present a particular image or to construct an image (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989).

Getting Ahead

Participants were asked why they enacted proactive behaviors and many reported that these behaviors were a way to get ahead in the organization. Participants reported enacting behaviors to get noticed by a supervisor, to show initiative, and to demonstrate their work. Participations such as Mindy discussed why she would go above and beyond in her position. Mindy shared that, when she recognized a problem, she would try to find a solution. In one case, Mindy became the expert in area because she recognized a problem and developed a solution. Mindy's action to fix this issue led to her work being noticed by a supervisor. She was able to demonstrate that she could do more than the basics of her job. When asked about why she was proactive in the situation, she said:

> Down the line, it's going to let me move into the division that I want to move into. So I want to move more towards an operations-based role, so I'm asking to do things in operations. Six months down the line, I will have been doing the operations piece for two years. So it just makes sense for me to move into that kind of role. So that's one good thing for me. It's a little bit selfish, but I had to come up with some sort of development plan for myself because the next step up from where I'm at would be a recruiter and it's not something I want to do. So I had to find different ways to move in a different path and this one just works.

Mindy realized that, by taking on extra roles and standing out, she could move her career in a certain direction. In Mindy's example, she was taking on tasks that were outside of her job role but that, nonetheless, needed to be addressed. Mindy discusses some on these extra role behaviors saying:

> Yeah, but that's my fault. When I first started, I didn't want to be doing what I was doing. I just needed to get out of the company I was at. When I got here, I did it for about a month and then I said, "I need to do something else. You need to give me more stuff to do because I'll lose my mind if I've got to do this for nine hours a day." So yeah, I should not be corporate training. I definitely should be showing people how to use our CRM. We have people for that but people don't want to do it. I also do not have to be doing the employee referrals but I like it, so I do it. Same with the terminated, the laid off employees, somebody in operations used to handle that. So that's why my job titles

> don't make any sense. I barely even do research anymore. My job title doesn't make sense and I'm working on changing that because I don't want that to be my title anymore.

Mindy recognized areas that needed improvement, such as corporate training, and she took on the task of improving that area. Mindy revealed that most of the additional tasks she took on were already being addressed but that they were handled poorly by people who did want to do them. Mindy not only identified this as chance to stand out but also as a chance to redefine her role in the organization.

Beverly also shared a similar experience initiating new forms of communication. Beverly shared that her job did not require her to use social media but that standard methods of communication were not effective. Beverly was asked why she took the initiative to use new forms of communication and if there were benefits. She responded, "I just applied for my boss's job, so I hope so." Beverly recognized the need to improve the flow of communication and to perform her job better to secure a promotion.

Jane discussed why she and her colleagues would take on extra tasks to try to improve organizational issues. Jane said, "To be honest, some people I know do it strictly so they can put the line on their resume and hope that it gets them something." Jane's example with her co-workers was not always a communication issue, but Jane felt she addressed communication issues. Jane created a demonstration video, held office hours, and facilitated an online chat board. She did this because there were issues with communication. Co-workers were not receiving information and were confused. When asked about why she would take on this extra work, Jane stated:

> I'm not going to lie, I'm hoping by me doing some of these things, someone might take notice and say, "Oh, well maybe if we do change the way we're doing things and you

> don't have to teach the four/four every semester, maybe Jane could step in and do something else in another type of role."

For Jane this proactive behavior may lead to a different type of role in the organization, or it might allow her to move up in the organization.

These examples provide evidence that proactive employee communication may be enacted to allow workers to move up, to be recognized, or to redefine their role. This represents an important finding because it may suggest that proactive behaviors are influenced by career motivations.

Image

Another important area to consider that falls under self interest is how people use proactive employee communication to construct an image. Using behavior to construct an image is supported by research in impression management, which proposes that individuals consider actions in the construction of their image (Arkin & Shepperd, 1989). This research suggests that concerns about impression management may guide social interactions (Arkin & Sheppard, 1989), which may explain the use of proactive behaviors to construct an image. Furthermore, research suggests that consideration of behaviors and impressions allows individuals to achieve goals (Arkin & Sheppard 1989), which may result in avoiding behaviors that create unfavorable impressions (Giacalone & Resenfeld, 1989).

Gwen provided an example of using proactive communication to create an image. Gwen discussed that she copies numerous people on emails, stating early in the interview that this was done to prevent miscommunication. However, Gwen also discussed another aspect of CCing:

> I find that CCing is almost strategic in a way because you're making sure all of your bases are covered. I mean, I think it's almost, in a way, it gets abused. I'll CC every

> single person going on that's involved in one way or another in a project just to make sure everybody's in the loop, nobody's left out, nobody's duplicating steps, things like that. So I see myself being more of an offender more than somebody who's being offended by the CC but I use it to my advantage because I want to be seen as a team player.

When asked if she was using the CCing to create an image, Gwen said “Oh absolutely. ‘Hey, I'm a team player. Check this out’ or ‘Look at all the work I'm doing. This is what I'm doing. Can you tell that I'm doing stuff?’” Gwen used CCing to not only solve a communication problem but also to create an image of a team player. Gwen further shared that CCing might be over used but that it was worthwhile, “Honestly, I know it happens, but I mean, the consequences of inaction or the perception of inaction highly outweigh the consequences of showing people all of these emails.” For Gwen copying numerous people on emails not only created the image of being a team player but also prevented the perception that she was not working.

Morgan also shared a similar experience when discussing sending out emails before vacation. Morgan noted that email was used to make sure everyone was on the same page and to prevent confusion. However, Morgan also used the opportunity to demonstrate to management that he was doing his job. Morgan said:

> From an email standpoint, because it shows that, “Hey, this is what I'm doing to make sure that my store is running properly.” So when I go on vacation, we set a person who's in charge on that. For my vacation next week, Brandon's going to be in charge and I'll have an email that goes out. The email will go to the majority of Best Buy leadership. It'll be copied to my boss as well as our operations manager. They'll be CCed on my communication. It's so that, I'm sending that communication to other people to

> communicate something, I'm copying them on it so that they don't have to ask me, "Well, did you let your store know?"

Personal

Another area supported by impression management literature is self construction of an identity. Research in this area suggests that individuals will enact behaviors that construct a self-identity (Baumeister in Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989, p. 59). Therefore, individuals will enact behaviors that match an ideal self-image (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989). For proactive employee communication, many participants reported that it was important to fix issues because it was a part of their self identity. Participants reported that if they were not effective in their job, it would reflect poorly on them and it would deprecate the image they wanted. This would seem like an external image, but participants reported that that doing a good job was personal, implying that doing a good job was crucial to the construction of self identity.

Lily provided an example of why she would enact proactive employee communication. In this example, she was concerned with how failure would reflect poorly on her, saying:

> If what needs to happen isn't getting done or isn't getting done effectively, that's kind of my job, is to communicate effectively between one group and my organization. So I feel like I'm the point of contact basically in all roles of what I'm doing. So I think it's a reflection of my abilities and skills if it's not going well with any particular party. So I definitely always want to address it most often.

Lily's experience demonstrates that employees are concerned with how organizational issues will affect their image. From this example, it would appear that Lily is concerned with her self-constructed image as an effective worker. She chooses to address organizational issues so she can maintain a positive self-image. Gwen echoed a similar belief when asked about times she would be proactive, "it really wouldn't take much because I try to be very efficient and a good person like in my position." Gwen has the self-identity that she is a good person in her position and to uphold this image she is proactive.

Peter shared a similar experience where being effective was very personal for him. It appears from his example that maintaining a good relationship with clients based on a job well done fed into his ideal self-image. When asked about why he would be proactive, Peter said:

> Oh yeah and customer satisfaction, because it's also a personal relationship though. That is a personal relationship because when I sell to these restaurateurs, it's like not only are they my client now but I want them to be my friends and I want to be able to see them in public and be like, "Hey, what's going on? How's the restaurant? How are things?" I don't want them to be like, "Oh, I'm pissed I worked with that Peter guy." So it's like professional but it's also personal. So that's why that affects me, I guess.

Peter wanting to be friends and to maintain positive relationships relates to how he views himself. Peter would only be proactive if it would positively affect his relationships with clients. Peter discussed other communication issues in the workplace but said the most important issues were around personal relationships.

Morgan also shared that doing a good job was very personal for him. He discussed stopping in to the workplace when he was not scheduled work and would not receive compensation for his time. Morgan said:

> So if I went hiking and I was driving past the store on my way home, I'd pop in for five or ten minutes just to see what was going on. So it was kind of at the beginning program put on, but now since they are so strict on you only get paid if you're in the store type thing, that it is not necessarily encouraged but it's something that I am personally doing

> just to make sure that my store, because I take ownership of my location, that it's running properly. I take pride, to take pride in your store, you sometimes have to take time out of your day off to go do things. Does that kind of make sense?

Morgan's behavior was not something required by his job, but he felt it was necessary to ensure his effectiveness. Morgan took this action because he took pride in his store. Morgan taking pride in his store indicates that doing a good job was part of his self-image.

Interestingly, proactive employee communication may lead to negative self-image. In this case, workers may avoid certain proactive communication if it were to lead to a negative self-image. Cindy provided an example where proactive communication led to a department looking bad. Cindy shared her experience:

> For instance, when we first got a new phone system, we were very encouraged to let them know if we foresaw any problems, any things that came up that we thought might be an issue and so forth and then a couple of people did and it was not met well. [Laughter] It was met with a very defensive approach, as in "Pffft, it's working fine" because it was like their baby, their thing that they did and they wanted it to be successful and they didn't want to admit there could've been something wrong.

It appears from the example that the negative feedback received threatened the self-image of workers in the department. This could be problematic in the future because if there are some serious issues, employees may hesitate to bring them up because it is met with defensive behavior. This also may suggest that if recognizing an organizational issue will cause a negative reflection on one's image they may avoid addressing the issue.

Overall, employees' efforts to get ahead, their image, and their self-identity play an important role in proactive employee communication. In most cases, it appears that employees use proactive behaviors to get ahead in the workplace and to construct positive images. One could argue that, without the incentive of getting ahead or a concern with image, proactive behaviors may occur less frequently. This next section may shed light on why employees choose not to engage in proactive behaviors.

Reasons Not to be Proactive

Despite numerous instances of proactive employee communication, employees also reported that they may not always engage in proactive behaviors. Unique to this finding is that many of the participants who reported engaging in proactive employee communication also reported that, at times, they avoid engaging in proactive behaviors. Factors that influenced proactive behaviors outline several areas of consideration in the previous section, but what is not known is what may prevent proactive behaviors. This next section will examine several findings that support the notion that even the most proactive employees may choose to skip proactive behaviors in certain circumstances.

Too Busy

Participants reported that being too busy hindered the proactive process. For some participants, they reported proactivity did not work because of busy work schedules. Other participants reported that their busy schedules only allowed for them to be reactive and not proactive.

One participant reported they would avoid proactive situations if the person on the receiving end of the action appeared to be overworked or too busy. This finding suggests that employees may not take action when the outcome of the action would affect another person in a perceived negative way. This inaction may be used to maintain positive relationships in the workplace.

Jane shared how there was a better way to handle department communication when providing information about meetings. When asked why she did not suggest a change in how the communication was handled, she explained that it would affect her colleague, “I guess I just feel like it'd be one more thing to add to her plate.” Jane further explained the situation saying:

> I know that her workload is really heavy and she has a lot of stuff going on and I would feel like it's just adding one more thing that she would have to do. It eventually gets done but there's all this other stuff that's probably a little bit more important I guess because her job has changed.

Jane’s example demonstrates how employees may recognize an issue but not address this issue because of the consequences associated with the action. If Jane choose to address this issue, her colleague would have more work. This also may suggest that organizational issues have to be important enough to merit action because of the possible negative outcomes associated with proactivity.

Mindy explained that she recognized a problem in the workplace with employee training on software. She developed a new type of training that would correct previous problems. However, this new type of training still faced challenges. Mindy explained the situation:

> It goes back to us being so busy. So because we’re all videoing in and I’m not seeing them face-to-face, they don’t have to be paying attention while I’m doing the training. They’re guaranteed doing something else. When I’m on calls, I’m working half the time because a lot of it doesn’t pertain to me or I already know something that’s going on. So it’s like, I’ll just work on something else. Recently, last week, I did a face-to-face training and I even let people see my screen and I literally made them go through the program as I've shown them. What was supposed to take 40 minutes took 2 ½ hours, so

> it was obvious those people were multitasking during the previous trainings. I'm keeping my fingers crossed that it actually works this time but who knows because recruiters are definitely a different breed and they're not open to, they only want to do what works because they're so busy.

For Mindy her new approach was challenged by the tension of being too busy. This could be problematic in the future because individuals learn from previous experiences about how to be proactive. If proactive behavior is consistently met by challenges, such as employees being too busy, individuals may choose not to be proactive.

Danny shared a similar experience with being too busy. Danny was discussing why he was not always proactive. Danny discussed the issue of time and workload:

> Yeah, I've had a discussion with my boss multiple times on, talking about time, right, there's this whole issue of time. So for you, does time and the availability of time or perception of time or the perception of how much time you should have affect one to either be reactive or proactive? I think an organization, due to the amount of time and really the perception of, "Hey, how busy are you? How busy should you be? Should you be working on this? How much depth should you be working in to solve a particular problem?", I think that kind of environment really puts us in a position to where we're more so reactive than proactive. So there's so much coming down the pipeline, there's so many emails. There's so much conversation and so many questions that it's respond, respond, respond. I think that our culture is that way nowadays a lot but it's less emphasis on planning and being proactive.

For Danny he felt that there was not a chance to be proactive because of the amount of work. Also Danny mentions the perception of being busy and the perception of how much time one has to go in depth. This comment from Danny may suggest that, within the organization, employees may need to appear busy and that maintaining this perception may require them to appear they lack the time to be proactive.

Overall, the idea of being "too busy" is an important factor that may prevent proactive employee communication. Findings suggest that overworked employees may not have the time to engage in proactive behaviors. Also important is that the perception of being too busy in the workplace and how that factors into proactive behaviors.

Negative Outcomes Associated with Proactivity

Another factor that may inhibit employees from engaging in proactive behaviors are negative outcomes associated with the action. One example is from Penny who was discussing that she wanted to learn a new system to help avoid organizational issues. Penny, however, was advised against learning new concepts by a supervisor. Penny explained the situation:

> Well, the person that was over me at the time is in my current position now. He said, "Oh, you don't want to learn any of that other stuff. You don't want to learn how to do web stuff because they're just going to make you have to do more work" and I've run into that with some other stuff. They've been like, "Oh, you don't want to learn the digital sales side of things because you'll just have to do more work" because if you learn how to do something in order to fix a problem, for instance, you kind of need to know that but then you'll have to do that work. So I mean, it kind of is this, and then you won't have time to do it but then on certain things I've learned like cross-training myself, stepping out of that and actually learning it has made my job easier in the long run and I've been able to morph our positions. We don't even have a social media person. After I went through and learned everything I was like, "Why do we have two people posting the same

> information? Why don't we have one person doing it?" and we were able to cover a longer period of time with less people. So it kind of helped in the long run but I think short term it was, "Oh, you don't want to learn this" kind of thing.

Learning new concepts and systems in the workplace helped Penny with her position. She shared how it was important to have an understanding of many systems in the workplace. This understanding led to more effective communication in the workplace. Despite the added benefits of cross training, Penny was advised against it because she would be given more tasks in the workplace. Even though Penny was still proactive, her colleagues felt that it would lead to negative outcomes.

Cindy shared a similar story of how proactivity could lead to negative outcomes. When discussing why one should be proactive, Cindy shared a story of how proactivity could be negative to one's career goals:

> Now, I will say that some people who may be very, do their job very very well, sometimes get moved up into different positions sometimes but a lot of times, I believe it holds them back because they think, "I've got a good person doing that job. I'll never find anybody to do it like that. Why would I promote that person?" You might help them out at raise time or something but I don't know.

Cindy's examples suggest that employees who stand out as going above or beyond, that perform well, may not move up in organization. If the employee is perceived as someone who goes above and beyond for the job, the supervisor may not want to promote the employee because they need to keep them in their position. In this way, being proactive may have a negative outcome on one's career goals.

Another participant shared a belief that proactive behavior was a waste time when dealing with certain departments. This participant reported being proactive in certain situations but that, when dealing with certain people, it was not worth her time. Beverly explained:

> I guess, like you know, you always know the ones that are going to be responsive and the ones that are going to be hit or miss and then there are some people that, it doesn't, honestly sometimes if I'm running behind on time, I won't even email certain people because it doesn't matter. They're not going to read my email anyway. So I can kind of skip that because it is irrelevant.

Beverly's example suggests that employees engaging in proactive behavior may have the negative outcome of wasting time. In this case, Beverly recognized that, when dealing with certain people, she could skip proactive emails because there was not a benefit associated with the action. Overall, negative outcomes associated with proactive behavior may prevent or prohibit future actions of proactivity.

Disenfranchised

Several participants reported that the organization did not promote proactive behavior. Participants felt they could not make changes in the system. Some participants discussed the organizational cultural as preventing change, reporting a lacked of power to make changes in the workplace.

Jennifer said that if she saw a problem in the organization, she may choose not to fix the problem. She added:

> I could totally say that and the horrible thing is that no one has any power to make any of these changes. So we can have all these great ideas and Baker is really great at putting in place fabulous new protocols for a ton of different stuff but there is no follow-through

> ever and what happens is people get so just beat down with the culture because the culture is, "Well, we've been in business since 1915 and this is how we've always done it and we don't care that it's inefficient and ridiculous, we're going to keep doing it this way." So eventually if you work there long enough, you just get sick of trying to have an opinion about things because nothing ever happens with it and it's family-owned and operated, so if you're not married into the family, what you say does not matter.

Jennifer further explained her frustration with the organization and attempts to fix organizational issues, stating:

> [Y]ou just get so sick of trying to fight it and you're never going to change it. So you either are resigned to the fact that you know that's how it's going to be and you're going to stay there and it doesn't bother you or you leave.

Jennifer's examples illustrate that for some employees they resign to doing strictly their job. For Jennifer there was not a point to be proactive, because her actions did not result in actual change.

Other participants shared similar experiences where the organization did not want to change. Beverly shared a previous experience, "I've worked in organizations before and they're like, 'If it's broken, please dust it under the rug. We don't want to know about it until it's broken so badly that there's no way we can possibly fix it.'" Cindy shared her experience with trying to improve an organizational issue. Cindy shared that that the her advice on improve was not taken well, she said "if you encourage people to tell you things and then it's met with defensiveness or even just any negativity, that person's not going to tell you anything again. They're going to shut down." Beverly and Cindy's examples illustrate how employees may feel change is not possible and may not engaged in proactivity.

Chapter 4

Discussion

The goal of this research study is to explore how employees proactively respond to perceived communication problems and to uncover what employees consider when proactively responding. The researcher proposed that employees would engage in proactive employee communication, which was defined as type a proactive behavior. The findings of this study not only support the existence of proactive employee communication but also provide evidence that the proactivity is a process with three primary stages, which aligns with current literature and definitions. The findings also support the notion that employees, when engaging in proactive employee communication, consider of number of different factors. At times these factors are unapparent to the employee, but they, nonetheless, subconsciously influence the chosen behavior. The following section discusses the findings of this study. Next, the researcher will discuss the theoretical and practical applications of this study. And finally, the discussion will address limitations of this study and future directions for research.

Proactive Employee Communication

Research question one asked how employees proactively respond to perceived communication problems within their organization. Findings suggest that employees engage in a variety of behaviors to correct perceived communication problems within the workplace. Findings also suggest that these behaviors are not just enacted but are part of a process in which individuals anticipate and plan for the proactive employee communication. Previous literature has suggested (Ashford & Grant, 2008) that individuals will anticipate problems or foresee future events, then plan for action, and subsequently take action. These stages of the proactive process were represented throughout the participants’ interviews.

Participant interviews highlighted a tendency to anticipate future problems. Anticipation is a crucial component in the identification of proactive behaviors. Bindle and Parker (2011) noted that for individuals to be proactive they must anticipate and have a future focus. Several participants reported anticipation of future communication problems, such as recognizing potential confusion around newly established procedures. Other participants anticipated future events and considered how their actions could result in a desired outcome. Together these examples provide evidence of the first stage of the proactive process.

The second stage, which is planning, was well represented in the interviews. Participants reported planning their proactive behaviors in several ways. For example, some participants carefully planned the perfect time to approach co-workers. Others reported carefully crafting emails and taking steps to avoid aggression with co-workers. The findings strongly suggest that employees are constantly contemplating how communication and actions will lead to certain outcomes. The findings also imply that employees think long-term when developing plans of action.

The third stage in the proactive process is the action taken by individuals. Several employees reported taking action by using multiple email messages or even unconventional forms of communication to reach unresponsive co-workers. Other participants reported the failings of standard operating procedures, and thus, discovered previously unconsidered approaches to correct perceived communication issues. The findings suggest that employees recognize communication problems and choose differing actions to achieve desired results. Crant (2000) defined these behaviors as proactive, characterizing them as those “taking initiative in improving current circumstances or creating news ones; it involves challenging the status quo rather than passively adapting to present conditions" (p. 436). During the interviews, participants consistently reported engaging in various forms of proactive behaviors.

Taken together, the findings of this study provide evidence that proactive employee communication is a process. Research supports the notion that proactivity is not a discrete event; it unfolds as a process (Crant, 2000). This process is represented in Figure 1, which demonstrates how the stages in the proactive process work together. Figure 2 in the next discussion section will address how certain factors influence the process.

Figure 1. Model of Proactive Employee Communication, Stages

This study also provided important knowledge about how employees perceive proactivity. Despite the additional effort inherent in these behaviors, that 'above and beyond' aspect, most participants did not view their behavior as proactive. Many participants admitted that their behavior exceeded the requirements of their role, but they viewed them as necessary to effectively perform their jobs. This finding may indicate that employees are in constant flux of redefining their job requirements to achieve effectiveness. This continuous redefinition of job requirements may negatively impact employees who take on new requirements. Over time employees may unknowingly redefine their role within the organization, which can ultimately lead to role confusion for employees.

Participants reported that there were rarely policies that address how to handle perceived communication issues. Most times, participants reported that their actions were taught to them by other co-workers. This is an interesting point because proactive behaviors may become an established norm over time. Proactive behavior, by definition, requires planning and challenging the status quo (Crant, 2000). If a behavior becomes the establish norm for operating, then, by definition, it is not a proactive behavior. However, the findings under the 'keeping a record' theme suggest that participants' proactive behaviors eventually convert to established norms. In the examples provided, participants reported anticipation of future problems and occasionally took actions deemed inappropriate. Participants reported also knowing that record keeping behaviors were required and trained other co-workers to following these behaviors. Despite the proactive appearance of these actions, in some cases these behaviors had become the established norm. This finding may provide an interesting insight into how behaviors move from outside the norm to an established norm for behavior.

Also interesting in regards to participants using email to keep a record, was that throughout the interviews participants consistently reported a preference for face-to-face interaction or phone calls. Participants noted the effectiveness of face-to-face and phone calls, but still used email to maintain records. Participants also discussed the overuse of email and the challenges associated with email management. Despite the negatives, participants remain dependent on email. This dependence stems from the role of emails in documenting certain actions and in keeping people informed. Findings further indicated that most participants anticipated negative consequences if they stopped using without email. These findings firmly suggest that employees face tension between the need for effectiveness and the need to maintain a record to avoid negative consequences. Additionally, this finding demonstrates that employees create extra work for themselves, as they seek to maintain records.

Another unique finding was that participants frequently involve other persons in their proactive behaviors. Several participants reported involving supervisors when taking action to address a perceived issue. In many of these examples, participants “tattled” on co-workers by copying supervisors on emails. In other examples, participants reported seeking another person’s advice or, alternatively, becoming a source of advice when perceived issues arose. Participants also reported involving co-workers to help address perceived organizational problems. These findings strongly suggest that proactivity is not merely a unilateral activity but often involves the assistance of others. Several assumptions may explain this finding. First, participants may seek advice from others to gain a better understanding of norms. These individuals may be new to the organization or the situation may be unique, meaning that standards practices are unfamiliar. Accordingly, these individuals may use advice from others to get clarification on the best way to address the issue within the norms of the organization. Another possible explanation for this phenomenon is that when employees involve supervisors, they are using the legitimate authority of their supervisors as a means to accomplish goals. Another explanation could be the “team up” effect, which occurs when the power of multiple person making a request increases the likelihood of accomplishing a goal. The “teamed up” scenario may also serve a buffer to shield the employee from negative consequences associated with an action. Overall, it is clear that employees utilize co-workers and supervisors to assist in their proactive behaviors.

Factors that Influence the Proactive Process

Research question two asked what employees consider when proactively responding to perceived communication issues. Findings suggest that proactivity is a complex process influenced by a number of factors. At times these factors may individually influence the proactive process or they may combine to influence proactivity. The following section discusses a number of factors that appear to influence proactive employee communication. This discussion is followed by a model that demonstrates how these factors may influence the process of engaging in proactive employee communication.

Among the more unexpected findings from this study was that physical space and geographic location influence proactive behaviors. This finding would seem self-evident, but as Pepper (2008) noted "organizational physical space matters is an obvious truism" (p. 319), which is often overlooked. The findings suggest that participants benefit from close physical spaces that allow easy face-to-face interactions. Several participants reported their colleagues were close enough to facilitate easily walking over to their desk or shouting to work colleagues. One participant reported that a co-worker switched to smaller office just to be closer to co-workers, complaining that she felt left out. Participants also reported difficulties when offices were separate or when faced with geographic separation in the organization. Overall, participants in close proximity to co-workers reported a preference for face-to-face communication over other methods. These finding suggests that closer physical space may increase proactivity in the organization. This finding is not novel; scholars previously discovered that the physical environment influences communication behaviors (Pepper, 2008). Nevertheless, this finding is unique because it suggests that physical space and geographic distance may influence the methods or tactics used for proactive behavior. Employees who can not initiate face-to-face communication with a co-worker may resort to emails or phone calls as a way to resolve issues. Ultimately, physical space may dictate how employees choose to carry out proactive behaviors.

Despite the importance of physical spaces conducive to organizational communication and proactivity, organizations must practice care before taking this measure to extremes. As one participant noted, his organization had recently moved to a new open concept building. At first this created difficulties for employees, as they were constantly interrupted by co-workers seeking face-to-face interactions. This could suggest that the organization created an environment with too much openness. To remedy this situation, the organization began using busy lights to indicate whether a person was available for personal interactions. Research cautions against open environments, and evidence suggests that negative outcomes for organizations can arise from their implementation (De Croon, Sluiter, Kuijer, & Frings-Dresn, 2005; Pepper, 2008). Together, organizations should consider the affect physical space plays on proactivity and communication, seeking to avoid negative outcomes.

Another factor that influences proactive behaviors is organizational norms. This factor appears essential to the proactive process. Several participants reported not taking action because it was not their place. In many of these examples, it was considered against the norm to take action on the issue within their organization. Participants provide examples, remarking, "there's a pecking order"; "there's a lot of politics"; "it's not necessarily my place to say anything about it"; "there's certain things you have to do or can't do because of certain people"; or "I don't feel like that's my place to be corrective there." These findings strongly suggest that organizations have established norms for handling issues, which may prevent employees from enacting proactive behaviors.

Additionally, findings suggest tenure and organizational norms interplay to influence proactive behavior. When participants had a longer tenure in the organization, they reported a tendency to act more boldly with less concern about negative consequences when engaging in proactive behaviors. One possibility for this finding is that participants become more comfortable within the organization over time and longer tenure provides a sense of job security, allowing participants more freedom to behave proactively. Another possible explanation is the notion that participants with tenure may simply be more familiar with organizational norms and possess a greater understanding of the appropriate times to defy them. This explanation is supported by the findings that participants with tenure were sought out for advice on how to handle organizational issues and the norms surrounding those issues. Overall, organizational norms play an important role in guiding the proactivity of employees.

Participants reported a number of factors related to self-interest that influence proactive employee communication. The researcher used the term self-interest because participants engaged in behaviors motivated by personal gain and unconcerned with benefitting the organization. Throughout the interviews, participants were asked why they would engage in proactive behaviors. Several participants noted that proactive behaviors allowed them to demonstrate their abilities and provided a means to advance within the organization. In several examples participants reported taking on extra tasks not required by their roles. This finding may suggest that proactive behaviors are used to redefine roles. Research exploring proactive behaviors previously concluded that proactivity may be used to redefine roles (Crant, 2000). One participant noted that she would take on extra duties and tasks because she did not like her current position. That participant noted that, over time, she was redeveloping her role in the organization by augmenting the scope of her work. Other participants reported a hope that proactive behaviors would get them noticed; an important consideration when applying for new positions within the organization. These findings demonstrate that self-interest may encourage individuals to engage in proactive behaviors.

Participants also reported using proactivity as a way to manage their image within the organization. Several participants provided examples of behaviors used to impress a supervisor. These participants were concerned with constructing a flattering image of themselves to supervisors and to others in the organization. This finding is unsurprising, as research has demonstrated that behaviors and interactions can be used to construct images (Arkin & Shepperd, 1989). Additionally, participants reported a concern with their internal image or self-identity. For these participants they felt a strong need to do well in their position because it represented who they were as a person. Therefore, participants' need to perform well often demanded proactive behaviors. Taken together, these findings suggest employees concerned with image may be more likely to engage in proactive behavior.

Although a number of factors appear to encourage proactive behaviors, participants reported several reasons not to engage in proactive behaviors. Participants reported that they and colleagues had large workloads, noting they were too busy to engage in proactivity. One participant even noted that he did not have time to be proactive but only time to be reactive. This finding suggests that employees may feel they cannot engage in proactive behaviors due to limited time in the workplace. Other participants reported possible negative outcomes associated with proactive behaviors. One participant shared that a co-worker discouraged her from proactivity because it would add extra tasks for her position. Another participant noted that going above and beyond could be detrimental to moving up in the organization. These findings suggest that employees may discourage proactivity to avoid negative outcomes associated with proactive behaviors. These findings may also suggest an organizational culture that discourages proactive behaviors. This notion is supported by the small number of participants who felt disenfranchised by their organization. Participants provided examples in which the organization norms prevent change from occurring, which resulted in participants avoiding proactive behaviors that would promote change.

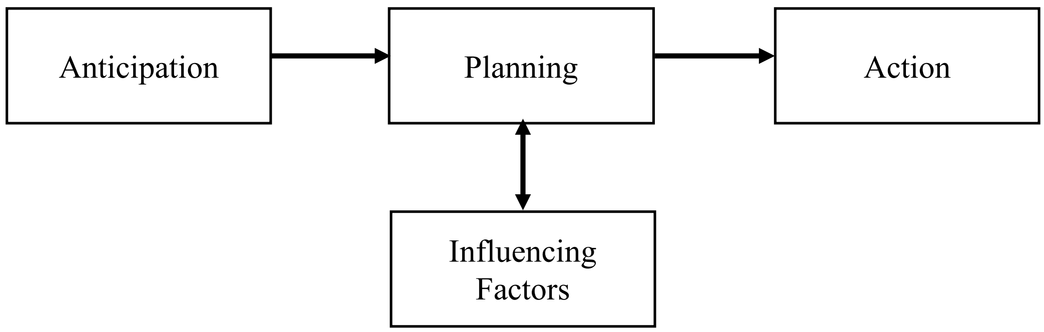

Figure 2. Model of Proactive Employee Communication, Factors

Overall, the factors such as physical space, organizational norms, self interest, and other factors may heavily influence the proactive process. Specifically, these factors should influence the planning stage with the proactive process. Model 2 demonstrates where within the model of proactive behavior that influencing factors may be considered. This influence should occur within the planning phase of proactivity. The line between planning and influencing factors has a double arrow to represent the notion that multiple factors may be included in the planning phase. In addition, there may be a back and forth between planning and the influencing factors. The anticipation of a problem that leads an individual to begin planning illustrates the back and forth mechanism because the individual may consider multiple factors. For example, the individual may consider the need to engage in proactivity with self interest in mind. However, after considering the personal gain (self interest), the individual may consider the organizational norms, which could change the appropriateness of the chosen form of communication. This example illustrates that the planning phase may go through multiple rounds with consideration of multiple influencing factors before deciding on the action.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The goal of this research study is to explore how employees proactively respond to perceived communication problems and to uncover what employees consider when proactively responding. The findings of this study establish this area of research and provide important knowledge with several significant implications. First, research examining proactive behaviors has been largely in the field of management research, but it has not explored the interplay between proactive behaviors and communication. The findings of this study demonstrate that communication plays an important role in proactive behavior and that proactive employee communication is one type of proactive behavior. Therefore, scholars examining proactive behaviors should consider how communication plays a role in proactivity.

Second, the findings of this study add to the body of knowledge that proposes proactivity is a process. Previous research (Crant, 2000; Bindl & Parker, 2011) supports the notion that proactivity unfolds over several phases and is not a discrete event. This research extends this proposition by providing evidence that proactivity is not a discrete event. Specifically, findings demonstrated that individuals plan their behavior. Planning proactive behavior is an established part of the process (Grant & Ashford, 2008); however, limited research provides an unclear picture of the planning process. Findings for this study provide a definitive illustration of the planning stage of proactivity. In addition, Grant and Ashford (2008) proposed that anticipation was a key part of the process. Findings for this study reveal how individuals anticipated communication issues within the workplace.

Furthermore, the findings of this study extend knowledge in the area of impression management and proactive behaviors. Research examining feedback seeking, a type of proactive behavior, concluded that feedback seeking could be used to construct impressions (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). Despite this finding, proactive behavior literature does not theoretically address the relationship between impression management and proactivity. The findings of this study indicate participants used proactive behaviors to construct favorable images, which allowed them to construct positive self-identities. This finding provides further evidence and support for an important relationship between impression management and proactivity. In summary, the findings of this study provide an important extension of knowledge that adds the theoretical body of proactive behavior research.

This study also contributes important knowledge to the field of organizational communication related to how individuals resolve perceived communication problems in the workplace. Currently, the field of organizational communication has largely focused on studying communication issues that result in serious consequences, such as the BP Deep Horizon explosion (Wickman, 2014) and the September 11th terrorist attacks (Chomik, 2011). This study further explored communication issues but in the context of every day communication problems. In addition, this study adds to the body of knowledge of how individuals respond to perceived communication issues, providing examples of actual actions taken to improve communication. Overall, the findings support the notion that individuals enact proactive employee communication to resolve perceived communication problems, which should be further explored by the field of organizational communication.

In addition to the theoretical implications, the findings of this study also have practical applications. As indicated by the findings, proactivity was prevalent in the workplace, and individuals engage in many different proactive behaviors. Not only was proactivity prevalent, but findings suggest individuals felt such behaviors necessary to get the job done. If organizations, therefore, wish to achieve effectiveness, they should encourage proactive behaviors. One way that organizations could encourage proactivity is by developing a "buddy system" within departments. Findings indicate that individuals often times engage in proactive behaviors with a co-worker. By having a "buddy system," organizations may see an increase in proactivity. Another way that organizations could encourage proactivity is by recognition and reward programs. Findings indicate that employees engaged in proactive behaviors with self-interest in mind may not be concerned with organizational improvement. Specifically, findings indicated that employees would consider how proactive behaviors may help them move along in their careers and may assist them in impression management in the workplace. Therefore, a recognition and award program within an organization may increase proactivity, as employees will individually benefit which is an important factor.

Also important were findings that indicated many factors influenced proactivity. Moreover, at times these factors may inhibit behaviors. Therefore, organizations should seek to address factors that would inhibit proactive behaviors. One primary finding of this study was that physical space played an important role in proactivity. Specifically, participants reported that if they were in close proximity to co-workers, they are more likely to engage in proactive employee communication with that co-worker. If organizations wish to increase proactive employee communication, they need to consider the physical grouping of employees. Findings also indicated that organizational norms and culture were a major factor that inhibited proactivity. Participants reported that, in certain circumstances, they felt it was not their place to address an issue. In most of these instances, employees were dealing with other departments and were able to identify an issue. In such cases, employees felt they could not address the issue because trying to correct issues outside their department was unacceptable. Therefore, organizations should try to establish a culture that promotes proactive behaviors and should consider how they can encourage employees to address issues that arise between departments. Organizations could establish guidelines for how to deal with issues while interacting with other departments or develop a culture that promotes open communication between departments.

Limitations

As with any study, there were several limitations to note. These limitations should be addressed in future research. One limitation for this study was that is largely dependent on individuals to recall specific behaviors. Participants may have difficulty accurately recalling specific events and behavior. Participants could potentially bias their responses to reflect a more positive self-image. One possible solution to this limitation is having participants record a daily journal to facilitate more accurate recall of proactive behaviors.

Another limitation is that participants were only able to provide a one-sided view of the experience. The one-sided view for participant meant that the problems or issues recognized by individuals are strictly from their perspective and may not be collectively shared with other co-workers. It is possible that some of the positive experiences shared from participants were not received positively by other organizational members. In conjunction with this limitation, participants sharing their perspectives on outcomes associated with proactive behavior may not fully know all outcomes associated with a behavior. Additionally, none of the participants were from the same organization, which may have been useful in fully understanding the behaviors and outcomes associated with them. A possible remedy to such limitations is to observe behaviors within a single organization and to interview multiple employees involved in a proactive behavior.

Future Research

The goal of this research study is to explore how employees proactively respond to communication problems and to uncover what employees consider when proactively responding, but the findings moved beyond exploring this new area and opened the door to many possibilities. As the discussion section indicates, there are still many areas to explore around proactive employee communication. Future research should continue to explore each area in more depth. An example of this need is in regards to the how people plan the behaviors. Findings for this study established that individuals do plan behaviors, but further inquiry is needed. Research should consider the multiple goals at play during planning and consider different elements of planning.

Future research should also explore how proactive behaviors influence role redefinement. In some cases, it appears proactivity may cause employee roles to be unintentionally redefined. In other examples, employees used proactivity to redefine roles as a means to benefit themselves. Further research is needed to understand this process and how role redefinement may negatively influence employees.

Future research should also examine employees' usage of email for record keeping. A large majority of the participants reported using email with alternative motives. The findings in this area suggest that employees used this to prevent negative consequences, but more research is needed to understand the complex usage of email.

Finally, future research should examine how and why employees involve co-workers when engaging in proactive behaviors. Findings in this area provide a small glimpse into the reasons for involving other co-workers, but much more research is needed. Future research should consider the factors that influence an employee to involve another employee in proactive behaviors.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Recruitment Flyer

Recruitment Flyer

Research study participants needed for interviews! We will be discussing aspects of communication within the workplace. The discussion will focus on: what types of communication work well in your organization; types of communication that do not work well in your organization; and how you respond to communication. You will have the chance to share your experiences and your perspective on your organization's communication. Individuals will not need to disclose information about their employer but should be ready to share their individual experiences.

Who can participate?We are looking for individuals over the age of 18, who are currently employed full time (35 hours or more per week), have at least one supervisor, and who have worked at their organization for at least one year.

Study Details:
Each interview will last around 1 hour and will be held in the Knoxville area or via Skype/FaceTime. Each participant will discuss different aspects of communication in his or her workplace. Information will remain confidential and participants will not need to identify their employer.

Participation is completely voluntary and involves no foreseeable risk greater than those encountered in everyday life. If at any time the participant feels uncomfortable, he or she may elect not to continue.

There are no monetary or tangible incentives being offered for participation in this study.

If you are interested in participating, please contact the researcher, Katie Reno, kreno@utk.edu, 989-313-0354

Appendix B. Informed Consent Statement

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT
Proactive Communication: An investigation of Interaction Patterns in Organizations

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to understand different aspects of communication in the workplace.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

You will participate in an interview lasting approximately 1 hour. You will be asked about aspects of communication within the workplace. The discussion will focus on: what types of communication work well in your organization; types of communication that do not work well in your organization; and how you respond to communication. You will have the chance to share your experiences and your perspective on your organization's communication. You will not need to disclose information about your employer but should be ready to share your individual experiences.

Each interview will be audio recorded so it can be transcribed. Audiotapes of the interview will be destroyed upon completion of the transcription. Direct quotations from participants may be used in the write-up of this study's results, but will not identify the participant.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks greater than those encounter in everyday life involved in the research.

BENEFITS

By participating in this study, you will be contributing to the existing body of research investigating organizational communication. The findings from this study may be used to develop strategies for improving organizational communication.

COMPENSATION

There are no monetary or tangible incentives being offered for your participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All audio recordings and documents obtained, including this consent form, through this study will be kept confidential. Consent documentation and data will be stored separately and will be secured in a locked office in 293 Communications Building, Knoxville, TN 37996. Only the researchers or transcriber will have access to the interview tapes and transcriptions. The transcriber will sign a transcriber's pledge of confidentiality. Tapes of the focus groups will be destroyed upon completion of transcription. Interview transcripts will be maintained for five years in a locked office on the University of Tennessee campus. Transcripts will then be shredded. Consent documentation will be kept for three years after the study has been closed.

Direct quotes may be used in the final analysis and write up; however, all participants will be given a pseudonym and all personally identifiable information will be removed during the transcription process.

_______ Participant's initials

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Katie Reno at 989-313-0354, kreno@utk.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-7697.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I am 18 years or older. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature ______________________________ Date __________

Investigator's signature _____________________________ Date __________

Appendix C. Interview Guide

After the Informed Consent

Introduction and Basic Points
Good [morning/afternoon/evening], as you may know, my name is Katie Reno, and I am a PhD candidate at the University of Tennessee studying Organizational Communication. I am working on my dissertation that focuses on aspects of organizational communication. Your insights will help me to understand more about internal communication and how employees handle different situations in regards to communication.

(*Repeat these points if individuals have questions about the consent forms they have signed*)

- Every opinion is valuable and I only want to know your thoughts and opinions.
- Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You may choose to skip a question or stop the interview at any time and for any reason with no penalty, especially if you feel uncomfortable with the question or subject. Your information will stay secure. I will not share your personal information, including your name, with anyone else. Unless you prefer otherwise, your name will not be linked to the information that you provide during the interview.
- This interview is being audio-recorded in case I need to listen to it later to clarify something from the notes. This recording will not be shared with others and will be destroyed at the end of this research.
- The interview should take no longer than an hour.
- Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Guide

1. Describe your current job. What are your duties and responsibilities?

2. What is the average day like for you?

   TRANSITION – I want to talk with you for a few minutes about communication in your current job.

3. What are your relationships like with the people you work with?
   With your supervisor?
   With your co-workers?

4. What's communication like between you and:
   Your supervisor
   Your co-workers

5. In many companies, people communicate through email, or by phone, or face-to-face. What kinds of ways do people exchange messages in your company?

   Probing questions: Can you give me some examples?

6. Tell me about the ways communication is effective in your organization. Give me some examples of situations in which communication worked well.

7. Tell me about the ways communication is not effective in your company. Give me some examples of situations in which communication did not work well.

   TRANSITION – I want to talk with you for a few minutes about ineffective communication

8. When communication is not working well in your company, how do people in your company respond? That is, what do they do about it?
   -***Why** do you think they respond like that?

9. Are people encouraged to be proactive and resolve communication problems?
   -If so, **how**? Can you give me some examples?

10. How do you respond to situations when communication is not working well?
    -WHY?? Can you give me some examples?

11. What would make you decide to take action to fix a communication problem?
    -Can you give me some examples?
    -What were you trying to achieve? Was it successful?

12. Are there times that you would not take it upon yourself to correct a communication problem?
    -Can you give me some examples? How did others in our company respond to this communication problem?

Closing

That's all the questions I have. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I have a short demographic questionnaire for you to fill out. This is optional and you do not have to answer these questions.

Appendix D. Questionnaire

Demographics Questionnaire

Your Age _____

Your Sex: Male ____ Female ____

Your Ethnicity (check one):

____ Caucasian	____ Hispanic
____ African American	____ Pacific Islander
____ Native American	____ Mixed (please specify) _______________
____ Asian American	____ Other (please specify) ________________

Please mark the highest level of education you have received.

____ Some High School	____ Associates Degree
____ High School Degree	____ Bachelor's Degree
____ Some College	____ Currently Attending a Graduate School
____ Currently Attending a College	____ Professional degree
____ Graduate Degree	____ Other (please describe) _______________

Work Information

(*Tenure*) How many years have you worked for your current employer?

(*Full-time/part-time*) How many hours do you work per week, on average?

About how large is the company where you work? (Choose one)

____ 99 or fewer employees

____ 100-250 employees

____ 250-500 employees

____ 500-1000 employees

____ 1000 or more employees

Appendix E. Initial Outline of Codebook

Initial Outline of Codebook

Proactive employee communication
- Action
- Anticipation
- Future focus
- Getting the job done
- Involving another person
- Keeping a record
- Unofficial communication

Factors that influence the proactive process
- Physical space and geographic location
- Being Careful and Planning for the action
  - Age
- Organizational Norms
  - Ruffle Feathers
  - Not my place
  - Veteran Employee
- Self Interest
  - Getting Ahead
  - Image
  - Show
  - Personal
  - Control over Situation
- Reasons not to be proactive
  - Too Busy
  - Negative outcomes
  - Nothing changes
  - Talk the talk but don't walk the walk

Vita

Katie M. Reno earned her Bachelor's degree in Communication with a Specialization in Public Relations from Michigan State University. She then completed a Master's degree in Communication from Western Michigan University before deciding to pursue a doctoral degree in Organizational Communication at the University of Tennessee in Fall 2011. During her time in the doctoral program, Katie worked on several research projects resulting in five journal publications. Katie's research areas include Organizational Change with a focus in Mergers & Acquisitions, Proactive Communication, Supervisor Feedback, and Communication Technologies in the Workplace. Katie also specializes in research methods with a focus in survey design and research. Katie's dissertation examined how employees' proactively respond to perceived communication problems and what factors are considered when responding.